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North Macedonia's President Pendarovski: Bulgaria Has Politicized Pendikov's Case



President of North Macedonia Stevo Pendarovski (BTA Photo)

Skopje - Bulgaria has politicised the [case of Hristian Pendikov](#), Secretary at the King Boris III Bulgarian Cultural Club in Ohrid, who was beaten up there on January 19, President of the Republic of North Macedonia Stevo Pendarovski said in an interview with the Macedonian Telma TV. Pendarovski said that both he and North Macedonia's government had clearly distinguished state competences, calling for responsibility, but had not tried to include this case in bilateral relations with Bulgaria.

Pendarovski pointed out that the message he had posted on his Facebook page after the announcement of the prosecution office in Ohrid, "sticking to the information from the prosecution office at the time", condemning the act of violence, pointing out that the beaten man was the secretary of the cultural club of Bulgarians in Ohrid, because the Ohrid prosecution said that the incident started with the words "Shame on you for being Bulgarian",

called on the competent authorities to clarify the whole case and the guilty to face sanctions.

North Macedonia's President said that he did not see such an objective reaction to the situation from the Bulgarian side. According to him, the case immediately entered the Macedonian-Bulgarian narrative of ethnic-related violence, proposing the idea that "he was beaten just because of that [his identity]".

According to Pendarovski, in the short term, those who politicise the case may "score some political points here and there because elections are coming, but in the long term they will get nothing."

"First, it is a historical narrative, or understanding of the relations between North Macedonia and Bulgaria, which dates back to the 1960s. It has entered the minds of many generations of Bulgarian politicians. I am not saying that there are not people here who see Macedonian-Bulgarian relations in this way. I am not saying that because the white spots or grey areas in both historiographies from the time of so-called socialism are present," Pendarovski said, according to whom the second reason for the ongoing tensions between the two countries is the upcoming elections in Bulgaria.

As for his proposal to issue a ban on the entry to his country to "one MP and other persons from Bulgaria", which he made after the Security Council meeting on Monday, Pendarovski said he did not mean the measure to be applied to those who claim that people living in North Macedonia are Bulgarians.

"Nowhere in the world is the *persona non grata* measure taken because of a political statement, at least not in democratic countries, and we claim to be a true European democracy," Pendarovski clarified.

He said he was referring to the [spiral of events](#) taken place in the last period, especially after the honouring of [Mara Buneva](#) on January 14 and the calls on the anniversary of Gotse Delchev for a large group from Bulgaria to arrive in Skopje, causing a counter-reaction in North Macedonia - "just come, on the other side there will be 1,000 Macedonians who will stop you from doing it".

"I assure you, there is prior information about many persons with bad intentions towards us and they will not be allowed to enter the country," Pendarovski said and expressed his expectation that Bulgaria would not encourage the arrival of organised transport on February 4 in Skopje, noting that he did not dispute "that Bulgaria has an interest in commemorating Gotse Delchev", and said he remained of the opinion that the 151st birth anniversary of the revolutionary would be celebrated "as befits a civilised democratic state".

Foreign Minister Milkov: Respecting Rights of People with Bulgarian Identity in N Macedonia Is a Political Issue

Sofia - Respecting the rights of people with Bulgarian identity, as well as of Bulgarian citizens living in the Republic of North Macedonia, is a political issue. It is enshrined in various documents, it is enshrined in the declaration of the National Assembly of October 2019 and we are obliged to react accordingly, Foreign Minister Nikolay Milkov said Sunday. He spoke in response to the [words of Macedonian President Stevo Pendarovski](#) that the case of the Bulgarian Hristian Pendikov, who was beaten up in Ohrid, was being politicised.

According to Milkov, the issue of relations with Bulgaria is actually a matter of internal political debate in the Republic of North Macedonia. He said that in Bulgaria, there is a largely established internal consensus on how the country should develop relations with its neighbour North Macedonia. In this sense, Milkov said he believed that this issue is not part of the internal matters of Bulgaria and will not be, including in the election campaign. At least not to the extent that this is happening in North Macedonia, where one of the most acute issues of confrontation between the ruling and opposition parties is precisely the relations with Bulgaria, Milkov noted. He admitted, however, that in some sense this could happen in Bulgaria too. "I admit that it cannot be completely ruled out as far as individual details of how exactly our relations with North Macedonia should be built, but on the main things we have a consensus and in this consensus is our strength," the Minister said.

He said that considering the case of the attack on Pendikov, one can refer to the statement of the Macedonian prosecution office from the very beginning. Milkov said that in the first hours after the incident, he had the feeling that there was some stampede there. "Immediately afterwards they had to admit that it was a hate crime. The prosecutor himself said that he was attacked precisely as a Bulgarian and because he is a Bulgarian, which is unquestionably a hate crime. In this sense, I believe that the statements of Bujar Osmani, who visited Sofia, were also true," Milkov said and thanked his colleague for this gesture.

Milkov said that in the first hours after the incident, he had the feeling that there was some stampede there. "Immediately afterwards they had to admit that it was a hate crime. The prosecutor himself said that he was attacked precisely as a Bulgarian and because he is a Bulgarian, which is unquestionably a hate crime. In this sense, I believe that the statements of Bujar Osmani, who visited Sofia, were also true," Milkov said and thanked his counterpart for this gesture.

However, according to Milkov, Osmani had relativised the situation in a sense and tried to share responsibility for incidents of this nature, saying that hate crimes and hate speech should stop on both sides of the border. "In that sense it is also an indirect recognition that this is a hate crime, it cannot be otherwise," Milkov said. He added that they should wait for the investigation of the case, which will come up with conclusions.

"The problem with this whole situation and this approach is that we very often have crimes of this nature that go unpunished or not investigated at all. We have the crimes that were committed against the headquarters of the clubs, we had attacks with firearms included. We have hate crimes, hate speech, which are committed every day, and against Hristian Pendikov, they were committed while he was in hospital. He was receiving threats and insults on his phone related to the fact that he feels he is Bulgarian," the Foreign Minister explained.

He said that the Bulgarian side would provide data on the likely authors of the insults so that they could be identified.

For now, Pendikov is staying in Sofia because it is considered unlikely that it is safe for him to return to North Macedonia, Milkov added, saying that when assurances are received that he can be safe, then he will most likely return.

Foreign Minister Osmani: Biggest Detriment to N Macedonia Will Be the EU Believing Public Pressure Applied on Ethnic Community Here

Skopje - Russia is among the factors that have an interest in keeping conflicts alive in the Western Balkans region in order to have an easier influence. Even the latest escalation of tensions in the relations between Bulgaria and North Macedonia will be welcomed by third countries that see a chance to maintain a permanent conflict here, North Macedonia's Foreign Minister Bujar Osmani said in an interview with Radio Free Europe on Sunday.

Osmani reiterated that summoning the Bulgarian ambassador to Skopje for consultations in Sofia was a disproportionate reaction "insofar as it relates to the incident in Ohrid", in which Hristian Pendikov, secretary of the King Boris III Bulgarian cultural club there, was beaten up, because the Republic of North Macedonia had taken "all possible measures".

"We immediately identified the perpetrators and one of them is in custody. Immediately the president, the prime minister, the foreign minister condemned what happened. I went to Sofia, and I expressed what the state should show to our citizens, so I don't really see what the connection is between the case and the reaction (of Bulgaria). Realistically there was a "careless reaction" in the public in North Macedonia, but in general the institutions reacted as the state should react in such cases. One cannot generalise from such an incident and draw conclusions about how the state behaves towards communities," Osmani said.

He identified the upcoming elections in Bulgaria as an aggravating factor "because elections usually complicate sensitive issues and do not give diplomats the space to do their job properly".

"The season of provocateurs and political profiteers (in both countries) is open and now everyone is in action, but we need to stop this cycle of mutual deterioration of relations and bring back a positive agenda. I think North Macedonia has so far done everything it needs to do to deal with an incident that can happen anywhere," Osmani pointed out.

He said there was no direct evidence of Russian involvement in the deterioration of relations between Bulgaria and North Macedonia, but that "there is a third

party interest in keeping conflicts alive or frozen in this region so that it is easier to exert influence, this has been known for a very long time." In his view, the escalation of tensions between the two countries is welcome for third parties "who will see a chance to maintain a permanent conflict here". Asked who those third parties were, he replied saying the Russian Federation.

Responding to a question on whether the amendments to the Constitution to include the Bulgarians living in the Republic of North Macedonia in the Preamble of the Basic Law, which is a condition for opening the negotiation chapters with the EU, would be accepted in such an atmosphere, Osmani replied that the constitutional changes are in the interest of the Republic of North Macedonia.

"Regarding Bulgaria's behaviour, analysts who observe our relations ask themselves how much Bulgaria is interested in the constitutional changes happening because these changes are in our interest. They will help the Bulgarian community, but they will be a turning point in our relations with Bulgaria in the interest of North Macedonia," Osmani said.

In an interview with the Nezavisen Vesnik daily issue during the past week, former ambassador of North Macedonia to Bulgaria Georgi Spasov developed the thesis that "everything that has been happening in the past week in the Bulgarian-Macedonian relations is part of Sofia's 'imperial ambitions' towards North Macedonia and the aim is not to accept the changes in the constitution and to keep the country out of the EU for a long time".

"If anyone is doing anything to prevent a new veto (by Bulgaria) to keep EU support for North Macedonia, it is the foreign ministry. Our main goal is not to ride the wave of emotions, but to work toward our long-term interest. The greatest damage that can be done to the country is for the EU to start believing that there is public pressure on an ethnic community, that there is some kind of discrimination, violence," Osmani said.

President Radev Condemns Shooting at Azerbaijan Embassy in Iran

Sofia - President Rumen Radev [condemned in Twitter on Saturday](#) the fatal shooting that took place at the Azerbaijan Embassy in Tehran on Friday. Radev called the attack "unacceptable and deeply disturbing" and confirmed Bulgaria's support behind Azeri President Ilham Aliyev's call for swift investigation and punishment for the perpetrators.

Radev extended condolences to the families of the victims.

The Embassy security chief was killed in the attack, and two guards were wounded.

Deputy Interior Minister to Attend Roundtable on Group of Experts on Action against Human Trafficking Report

Sofia - A roundtable to discuss the Report of the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings from the Third Round of Assessment of Bulgaria will be held on Monday morning at Grand Hotel Sofia. Deputy Interior Minister Monika Dimitrova-Beecher will attend the opening ceremony.

The forum is organized by the Council of Europe and the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, which is chaired by the caretaker Deputy Prime Minister for Public Order and Security and Minister of Interior Ivan Demerdzhiev.

Interior Minister Demerdzhiev To Hold Working Meeting In Skopje On Jan. 30

Sofia - Deputy Prime Minister for Public Order and Security and Interior Minister Ivan Demerdzhiev will have a working meeting in Skopje on Monday, January 30, the press service of his Ministry announced Saturday. During the talks, the sides will discuss the organization of the upcoming commemoration of the 151st birth anniversary of revolutionary Gotse Delchev, and joint actions to ensure a peaceful and secure environment for the celebrations on February 4 this year.

The meeting, which will start at 12:00 local time at the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of North Macedonia, and will also be attended by Bulgarian Deputy Secretary General of the Interior Ministry, Chief Commissioner Stanimir Stanev. Statements to the press are expected after its conclusion.

On Friday, [caretaker Prime Minister Galab Donev and his North Macedonia counterpart Dimitar Kovacevski also discussed](#) the need of a peaceful and smooth commemoration of the birth anniversary of Gotse Delchev via a telephone call.

Production Process for Bulgarian Batch of Fighter Aircraft Has Begun, Lockheed Martin Representative Says



F-16 fighter jet (Photo: Lockheed Martin)

Sofia - The process of production of the Bulgarian batch of fighter jets has already started, Jonathan Lin, who is responsible for strategic partnerships with Central and Eastern Europe of the manufacturer Lockheed Martin, told NovaTV on Sunday. In November 2022, [Parliament approved the acquisition of eight more new F-16](#) Block 70 fighter jets and equipment for them.

Lin clarified that the Bulgarian fighter jet is already on the production line, and the main assembly is currently underway. The company does not have the eight fighter jets that were ordered in the first batch yet, only the first one is on the line for now. We hope to assemble it and see it fly next year, Lin said. He added that the deliveries are being carried out according to the already agreed mechanism, the specific dates are written in the contract between the US and Bulgaria. The manufacturer is working so that Bulgaria has them around 2025, the Lockheed Martin representative assured.

He explained that the F-16 has been in production for several decades and has been upgraded over the years.

Lin noted some of the specifications of the fighter jets prepared for Bulgaria and expressed his excitement that Bulgaria will get new technology implemented in the batch.

According to him, these are two technological features that provide advantages to Bulgarian aviation and military pilots. He reported that several Bulgarian pilots are currently training at the Arizona Training Center.

Deputy PM Pekanov: Regulators Should Take Measures Before Bulgaria's Euro Changeover to Prevent Price Speculation

Sofia - Caretaker deputy prime minister for EU funds management Atanas Pekanov said that in the first day of the introduction of the euro in Croatia, some retailers took advantage of the situation to speculate with the prices of goods. According to him, price speculation is a serious problem and the main one with the introduction of the new currency. Pekanov, who spoke on the morning programme of NovaTV on Saturday, pointed out that very clear action would be needed, and this issue should not be neglected. He said that measures involve very clear policies of the various regulators, for example the Consumer Protection Commission and the Competition Protection Commission, in order to implement measures that would protect the end consumer.

He pointed out that in Croatia for this reason serious fines are imposed, which according to him, will lead to some retail outlets no longer affording such practices.

Pekanov described the information campaign to initiate a referendum against the introduction of the euro currency in Bulgaria in 2024 as glossy and well prepared.

According to him, the campaign promotes a bunch of myths and, in his opinion, false facts. For example, that Bulgaria will abandon its monetary policy, when it has already done that in 1997 by joining the Currency Board, Pekanov said. This brought stability to the Bulgarian lev, the country needs to take the next step of integration so that it can participate in decisions that it is currently only assimilating, he added.

Pekanov also said that a date for Bulgaria's entry into the euro area remains realistic, but there are criteria that have to be met. He pointed out that inflation was still too high and there were three more laws to be adopted by Parliament. Normally the decision by the EU Council to enter is taken in July. After that, if Bulgaria's euro membership is approved, the introduction of prices in leva and euro should happen in August, he explained.

By its decision of October 27, 2022, the National Assembly decided for Bulgaria to adopt the euro, and instructed the government to speed up the process of the euro changeover with a target date of January 1, 2024.

Expert: Trade Turnover between Bulgaria, Austria Will Exceed BGN 3 Bln in 2023



BTA Photo

Sofia/Vienna - In an exclusive interview for BTA, Desislava Stoyanova, head of the Commercial and Economic Section of the Bulgaria Embassy in Vienna, said that Austria is the second largest foreign investor in Bulgaria, with an investment volume of some BGN 9.78 billion. The total trade turnover in 2023 is expected to exceed BGN 3 billion.

About 350 Austrian companies operate in Bulgaria, employing roughly 300,000 people. According to the latest annual survey conducted by Advantage Austria in Sofia, more than 60% of Austrian companies in Bulgaria rate as good the quality of local suppliers, access to credit and capital, labour costs, as well as customs duties and taxes. However, a serious problem that investors face in Bulgaria is the lack of skilled labour force.

Stoyanova pointed out that the tourism sector has a great potential. "A lot can be done in the field of balneology and specialized forms of tourism - wine, cultural and historical," she said.

She shared her belief that more and more efforts will be made on Bulgarian side under the Dual Education project, which is based on an Austrian model. The project involves 15 Austrian and German companies that offer apprenticeships in mechatronics, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, retail, logistics, and pharmaceuticals.

As strengths that Bulgaria has to offer, Stoyanova listed the country's strategic location, being an EU Member State, and the access to certain funds, which companies have as a result. "Austrian entrepreneurs understand this very well, which is why Austria is a leading investor in Bulgaria," she said.

There are Austrian companies currently exploring Bulgaria as an investment location for in the energy, metalworking, and construction sectors.

Stoyanova noted that the coronavirus pandemic had no impact on the Bulgarian-Austrian trade relations. They were even strengthened.

As far as high energy prices are concerned, the expectation is that they will boost the interactions between the two countries. Austria is a leader in energy conservation technologies in all sectors, but also in the development of renewable energy sources. "Huge investments are being made in research and development in these areas and this is a very promising area of cooperation between Bulgarian and Austrian companies, research institutions and development centres," Stoyanova said.

Trade with Austria has increased steadily in recent years. Bulgaria's exports in 2021 increased by 28.2% compared to 2020. In 2022 it increased by 35.8% compared to 2021.

Some of the sectors that account for the largest revenues in trade relations are non-ferrous metals, machinery and components, electrical appliances, construction, pharmaceutical and medical products, agricultural products.

According to Stoyanova, tourism has a lot of potential: "We can do a lot here in the field of balneology, but also in specialized forms of tourism: wine tourism, cultural and historical tourism".

For Bulgarian companies that aim to expand on the Austrian market, Stoyanova shared that this market has very high standards. It is very important to maintain the quality level at a constant level. For technical products in particular, providing maintenance and spare parts is of great importance.

The assistance of the Commercial and Economic Section of the Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria in Vienna can also be essential for the success of Bulgarian manufacturers targeting Austria.

"But the most important thing is quality products with a competitive price and persistence, persistence, persistence," Stoyanova concluded.

Wholesale Food Prices in Bulgaria Rise by 0.73%

Sofia - The Market Price Index of wholesale food prices in Bulgaria rose by 0.73% to 2.331 points this week. The Index saw a marginal drop to 2.314 points last week - the first drop since August 2022, when the Index was at about 2.05 or about 13% lower than the current estimate.

The baseline of 1.000 points was set in 2005.

Hothouse tomatoes lost 2.2% and were selling at BGN 3.18/kg. Hothouse cucumbers gained 6.7% and were selling at BGN 3.96/kg. Red peppers appreciated by 3.9% to BGN 3.50/kg by the end of the week.

Potatoes lost BGN 0.01 and sold at BGN 1.24/kg. Carrots lost 1.9% and sold at BGN 1.04/kg. Cabbage lost 13% and sold at BGN 0.80/kg.

Apples lost 7% and sold at BGN 1.33/kg. The price of lemons dropped by BGN 0.07 to BGN 2.54/kg. Oranges gained BGN 0.04 to BGN 1.77/kg, mandarin oranges sold at BGN 2.11/kg, bananas sold at BGN 3.13/kg.

White brined cheese from cow's milk edged down by 0.4%, selling at BGN 11.30/kg. Vitosha yellow kashkaval cheese lost 0.8% and sold at BGN 18.19/kg.

Sunflower oil appreciated by BGN 0.02 to BGN 4.19/litre.

The price of butter dropped by 1.3% to BGN 2.93 per 0.125 kg. Chicken increased by 1.5% to BGN 6.10/kg.

Sugar increased by 0.8% to BGN 2.55/kg. Grade 500 flour sold at BGN 1.39/kg. Rice went up by 1.7% and sold at BGN 2.93/kg.

Eggs were selling at BGN 0.39 a piece at the end of the week.

Base Interest Rate at 1.30% in December 2022

Sofia - The Base Interest Rate in December 2022 was 1.30%, increasing by 0.71 percentage points from November 2022, the Bulgarian National Bank (BNB) said in its Interest Rate Statistics for December 2022. The Interest Rate on Excess Reserves was 0.00% and remained unchanged from November 2022.

Nessebar's South Beach Inspected Following Alert about Damaged Sand Dunes



BTA Photo

Nessebar, on the Balck Sea - Experts from the Regional Inspectorate for Environment and Water (RIEW) in Burgas carried out an inspection following a signal for ploughing of dunes on the southern beach in Nessebar. On the spot, it was found that a trench about a meter deep was dug along the dirt road leading to the beach. With a GPS device it was established that the trench runs along the border of the protected area "sand dunes" without entering it, the RIEW reported Sunday.

The protected area was not affected but landscape disturbance was found. At the time of the inspection, the persons who carried out the excavation were not found to be present. Joint inspections with other competent authorities are planned to establish the causes of the violation and to initiate administrative and criminal proceedings, including measures to restore the damage.

On Saturday, the concessionaire of the southern beach in Nessebar informed the media that part of the dunes were

ploughed, probably with an excavator. He has alarmed the Ministry of Tourism, the Burgas Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Interior, the Nessebar Municipality and the RIEW.

The Ministry of Tourism said it would also carry out an investigation into the reports of destroyed dunes on the southern beach in Nessebar, working in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior and other competent authorities and institutions until the circumstances are clarified. If an offender is found, an administrative offence report will be issued.

Sofia to Host Balkan E-commerce Summit in April



Event poster

Sofia - Representatives of Romania, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, North Macedonia, Croatia, Montenegro, and others will make presentations at the conference and expo area of the Balkan eCommerce Summit, the Bulgarian Industrial Association said Friday. The forum will take place on April 4 - 5 in Sofia Tech Park.

Speakers and over 450 guests from more than 12 countries are expected. The official language of the Balkan eCommerce Summit is English.

Participants will outline the main ways and challenges to enter their markets and give guidance on what new market players should look out for there.

The most valuable thing about this first-of-its-kind Balkan forum, according to organizer Nikola Ilchev of eCommerce Academy, is that it "will give representatives from all these markets the opportunity to meet in one place and exchange valuable experiences and ideas, as well as find ways to make trade between them even better. United, the Balkan Peninsula is a fairly big market that is appealing to any eCommerce merchant. At this event, one can find a lot of

useful and inspiring information and many new contacts with potential partners, service providers, and others to interact with face-to-face." The organisers say that they will ensure that every visitor gets the most out of the two days with presentations by international speakers, the expo area, and the networking party after the end of the first day.

During the event, there will also be discussion panels, and live presentations about the individual markets of the Balkan Peninsula, delivered by local specialists and recognizable leaders there.

Day 33: RSV 421 Sails off Coast of Brazilian State of Espirito Santo

Atlantic Ocean - On Day 33 of its journey to the Bulgarian Antarctic base on Livingston Island, the Bulgarian military research/survey vessel *Sv. Sv. Kiril i Metodii* (NAVAL RSV 421) sailed about 60 nautical miles east of the coast of the Brazilian state of Espirito Santo in the morning hours of January 28, Lieutenant Commander Radko Muevski told BTA.

Sticking to its south-southwest course across the Atlantic Ocean, the RSV 421 will travel about 50 more miles to a point between Espirito Santo's capital, the city of Vitoria, and Brazil's Pampo oil field, located inland on the continental shelf. There, the ship will make a turn to the second stop of its voyage - Mar del Plata in Argentina.

The distance ahead for RSV 421 from the turn off Vitoria to Mar del Plata is another 1,400 miles.

Since departing from the port of Varna on December 27, RSV 421 has travelled approximately 4,300 miles, crossing the Black Sea, the Sea of Marmara, the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas, and a good portion of the Atlantic Ocean. The *Sv. Sv. Kiril i Metodii* is on a historic first voyage to Livingston Island to support the 31st Bulgarian Antarctic Expedition.

BTA's Daily News editor Konstantin Karagyozov is the only member of the media who is travelling on board the ship to Livingston Island and back, and will cover the Bulgarian expedition on site throughout the stay in Antarctica.

All media outlets can use the [Bulgaria-Antarctica BTA's Log](#) for free.

Officer Designate Petrov: Bulgaria on Livingston Island Contributes Much to Science



Officer Designate Andrey Petrov (BTA Photo)

The Atlantic Ocean - Officer Designate Andrey Petrov shared with BTA his belief that Bulgaria's presence on Livingston Island contributes a lot to science. "And it is well known that it [science] is the driving force in people's lives," Petrov noted aboard the Bulgarian military research vessel *Sv. Sv. Kiril i Metodii* (NAVAL RSV 421) on its way to the Antarctic.

Outside his duties as watch officer on RSV 421, Petrov is the Commanding Officer of vessel No. 221 at the naval base in Varna. He has been nominated twice for the title Petty Officer of the Year in the Officer Designate category by *Ocean Club* magazine.

Petrov clarified: "The first time was for the rescue mission that my crew and I performed after a helicopter crashed into the water. [The incident happened on June 9, 2017, when a Bulgarian Navy AS Panther 565 MB helicopter crashed into the Black Sea during training manoeuvres. The crew of three were recovered from the water, but their commander, Captain Georgi Atanassov, died. The two other crew members, Captain Pavel Simeonov and Captain Anatoli Apostolov were hospitalized with minor injuries.] We arrived first on the scene and started the rescue work. The second time [...] was for my participation in the retrieval of the [Vera Su motor ship, stranded off the Kamen Bryag coast](#), and for my prolonged activity at sea. Throughout 2021, my crew and I spent a total of 52-53 days at sea".

The idea of taking on the challenge of sailing to Antarctica was born back in 2004, when Petrov was serving on the Navy's hydrography vessel Admiral Branimir Ormanov. He

said: "Then, in 2004, Prof. Pimpirev and then Foreign Minister Solomon Passy visited the vessel. The idea was born that the government should take some action, so that our scientists could be assisted logistically - with the transfer of materials for a new, state-of-the-art research facility on Livingston Island. For some reason, the plan fell through, but after the idea was revived a year and a half ago, I personally received an invitation from the head of the Naval Academy in Varna, Admiral Boyan Mednikarov, and the deputy head of the academic department, Captain Kalin Kalinov, to join the crew". Eventually, he was assigned as a watch officer.

Petrov spoke about his scientific career. "Fourteen years of my career were spent on the hydrography ship - we did hydrological expeditions, navigational sounding. That is how, together with the Institute of Oceanology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, we once discovered a new species of jellyfish in the Black Sea. I have the necessary insight into such activities to be able to stand firmly behind the idea that the state should support the activities of our scientists on Livingston Island. The fact that we are firmly established on Livingston Island contributes a lot to science," Petrov concluded.

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Day 33: RSV 421 Circumnavigates Cabo de Sao Tome, Brazil

The Atlantic Ocean - The Bulgarian military research vessel *Sv. Sv. Kiril i Metodii* (NAVAL RSV 421) circumnavigated Cabo de Sao Tome, the easternmost point of the Brazilian state of Rio de Janeiro, and set on direct course to Mar del Plata on its way to the St. Kliment Ohridski Bulgarian Antarctic base on Livingston Island.

Mar del Plata is the second intermediate stop on RSV 421's route to the Antarctic. There, the vessel will be boarded by scientists and logisticians from the Bulgarian Antarctic Institute.

The ship's cargo - food supplies, cement, building foundations, water treatment equipment - will support the polar mission.

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member of the media who is travelling on board the ship to Livingston Island and back, who will cover the Bulgarian expedition on site throughout the stay in Antarctica.

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Day 34: RSV 421 Speeds Up to 11 Knots

The Atlantic Ocean - The Bulgarian military research vessel *Sv. Sv. Kiril i Metodii* (NAVAL RSV 421) increased her average speed to 11 knots in the morning hours of the 34th day of her voyage to Antarctica. The ship is sailing to the second intermediate stop, Mar del Plata.

On Sunday at 10:30 hrs board time, (06:30 hrs local time, 11:30 Eastern European Time) the vessel was 33 nautical miles southeast of Cabo Frio and the Araruama Lagoon, maintaining a south-southwest course.

Since departing the port of Varna on December 27, the ship has covered nearly 4,500 miles, crossing the Black, Sea of Marmara, Aegean and Mediterranean Seas, as well as much of the Atlantic Ocean.

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Chief Petty Officer Evgeni Michev Combined His Childhood Dream of Becoming a Military Man with His Love for the Sea

Atlantic Ocean - My childhood dream was to become a military man. I combined it with my love for the sea and decided to become a ship navigator, Chief Petty Officer Evgeni Michev, a cadet at the Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy in Varna, told BTA. He was one of the 23 cadets who had a training practice with the Bulgarian military research/survey vessel *Sv. Sv. Kiril i Metodii* (NAVAL RSV 421) from Varna to Cartagena (Spain) in the period between December 27 and January 7.

First of all, a Navy officer must be well prepared and

physically and mentally stable, Evgeni believes. Challenges in the Navy are not that big, but you can't snap your fingers and go out in your free time like ordinary students - we have evening checks, and everything is under strict order, he also shares about the inherent discipline.

Although he already had a few sailings under his belt before he boarded the *Sv. Sv. Kiril i Metodii*, he has not sailed for a longer period than 3-4 days and enjoys the opportunity to gain experience and knowledge from the lecturers from the Naval Academy who accompanied the cadets, as well as from the ship's officers.

I was pleasantly surprised, the captain told us about the modern navigation systems and how to deal with emergencies if these systems go down. He also taught us how to handle the radar to avoid going "blind" and how to read changes in weather conditions to predict if bad weather is coming, Michev said.

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Bulgarian Comedy Guest Performance in North Macedonia Cancelled



Vrazhalets poster stamped with "Cancelled"

Sofia - The theatrical performance of Bulgarian writer and ethnographer Stefan L. Kostov's comedy *Vrazhalets* [Soothsayer], which was planned to delight audiences in three cities in the Republic of North Macedonia in early February, has been cancelled. The guest performance, initiated and financed by the Bulgarian Memory Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was scheduled for February 1, 2 and 3 in Bitola, Stip and Strumica, the

organisers recalled.

In Thursday afternoon, within the space of several minutes, two notifications were received from the venues in Stip and Strumica about the unilateral termination of the contracts for the event due to technical problems on the territory of the theatres related to the electrical system, roof structure and heating, which do not allow the event to take place there, the Bulgarian Memory Foundation team said.

They also contacted the theatre in Bitola, where they did not receive a categorically positive answer that the performance could take place as planned. So, unfortunately, the *Vrazhalets* guest performance cannot take place in the Republic of North Macedonia at this stage, the team added.

Six Adventure Films to Be Screened at "Days of Challenges" Fest

Sofia - Six adventure films, including two Bulgarian productions, will be included in this year's ["Days of Challenges" film festival](#) at Lumiere Cinema in Sofia, the organizers reported. The event will take place on February 1 and 2 in Sofia.

The film *Passion 4 Peaks* will present two Bulgarian athletes - runner Petar Ivanov and mountain biker Tsvetan Ivanov, who climbed the highest peaks of four Bulgarian mountains in less than 24 hours. *Electric Avenue* will showcase climbers Viktor Varoshkin and Emiliyan Kolevski, who set a new route at 4,000m altitude, below Mont Blanc.

French mountain guide Thierry Renault will speak the event. Since the 1980s, he has covered every type of free and ice climbing.

Guillaume Pierrel, another alumnus of the Chamonix school, is still in the early stages of his career, which is focused on extreme skiing. Pierrel will give a presentation, followed by the short documentary [O'Parizad](#), which features him.

Topics such as huts, mountain safety and key conservation causes will be raised at the festival.

The Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds will present its project to purchase land in Sakar Mountain, Southeast Bulgaria, where several species threatened by farming activities can be conserved. Those include the European ground squirrel, the eastern imperial eagle, and the falcon.

Another environmental initiative to be announced at the forum is the preservation of centenarian trees - a project, popularized by the [2021 Bike and Run for Chepan competition](#). This year's edition of Bike and Run, on April 29, will focus on the mapping of centenarian trees through a dedicated smartphone app.

The festival will pay tribute to Bulgarian zoologist and mountaineer Boyan Petrov, who would have turned 50 in early February. Petrov managed to climb 10 out of the 14 eight-thousanders in the world, despite being a diabetic and a cancer survivor. He [went missing in the Himalayas](#) on May 3, 2018.

Vazrazhdane Wins 2023 Big Brother Anti-Award for Breach of Personal Data Protection

Sofia - The winner of the 2023 Big Brother Anti-Award, organized by the [Access to Information Programme \(AIP\)](#) and Internet Society Bulgaria, is the political formation Vazrazhdane - for their violating the protection of personal data and privacy. This was announced by Alexander Kashumov, Head of the AIP legal team, during the award ceremony on Saturday in Sofia.

This dishonour went to Vazrazhdane, after the party published the PINs of more than 800 Bulgarian citizens in its attempt to stigmatize them and declare them spies, Kashumov said.

"Vazrazhdane's nomination differs from the rest in that there was a deliberate dissemination of personal data," media expert Georgi Lozanov said. Vazrazhdane was trying to trigger its electorate to launch an abusive campaign against supposed enemies of the party, according to Lozanov. This is reminiscent of the idea of radical evil in totalitarian societies - to declare a part of society as superfluous or harmful.

Another nominee was the National Revenue Agency (NRA) for the inadequate way of having users turn off certain cookies, which allows companies such as Google to learn what those users were doing on the NRA website.

The Ministry of Education and Science was also nominated for the anti-award because of the way it processed students' personal data, including data of underage children, while conducting school Olympiads, Kashumov said. The submitter of that nomination also filed a complaint, which resulted in the Ministry instructing schools on how to comply with the European regulation and the Personal Data Protection Act.

DSK Bank was another Big Brother nominee. "The bank's 2019 case continues to languish in certain obscurity," said Veneta Shopova of the Commission for Personal Data Protection. At the time, it was discovered that data from the credit files of more than 33,000 people had been exported, with credit, financial and property information, as well as medical information, including information about guarantors. The Commission identified the unauthorized access and issued a penalty notice for BGN 1 million, which is appealed in court.

The AIP first organized the Big Brother Anti-Awards in 2003. Saturday's ceremony was dedicated to the European Data Protection Day - January 28.

The anti-award was established in 1998 by the NGO Privacy International.

The prize is a statuette of a military boot crushing a head. Another ceremony will be held this year in Germany in April.

Council for Electronic Media to Have Open-Door Day in March

Sofia - The [Council for Electronic Media \(CEM\)](#) will organize an open-door day to present its activities for the first time to anyone interested in the Council's work, the CEM press office reported. The event will take place on March 1 at the CEM building in Sofia.

Visitors can join a tour to get familiar with the work that goes into specializer monitoring, with the specifics of the regulator's overall activities and its experts.

The full programme of the open day will be published in the second half of February on the Council's website.

COVID-19 Update: 60 New Cases, Test Positivity Rate at 2.3%

Sofia - The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Bulgaria reached 1,295,242, after 2,577 tests identified 60 new infections on Friday, 68.33% of which were of unvaccinated persons, according to data posted on <https://coronavirus.bg/>. The test positivity rate now stands at 2.3%.

The active cases are 2,832. Currently, the hospitalized patients number 269, including 38 in intensive care. Of the 16 hospital admissions, 56.25% were not vaccinated.

Another 192 COVID-19 patients have recovered over the last 24 hours, bringing the total to 1,254,236.

Two fatalities were reported, all of whom unvaccinated, and the death toll now adds up to 38,174.

With 154 new inoculations over the last 24 hours, 4,606,774 vaccine doses have been administered so far.

COVID-19 Update: 13 New Cases, Test Positivity Rate at 1.5%

Sofia - The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Bulgaria reached 1,295,255, after 875 tests identified 13 new infections on Saturday, 69.23% of which were of unvaccinated persons, according to data posted on <https://coronavirus.bg/>. The test positivity rate now stands at 1.49%.

The active cases are 2,835. Currently, the hospitalized patients number 270, including 37 in intensive care. Of the 3 hospital admissions, 66.67% were not vaccinated.

Another 10 COVID-19 patients have recovered over the last 24 hours, bringing the total to 1,254,246.

No fatalities were reported, and the death toll stays at 38,174.

With 5 new inoculations over the last 24 hours, 4,606,779 vaccine doses have been administered so far.

Mountain Rescue Service: Avalanche Danger on Mountains' Exposed Areas



Vitosha Mountain (BTA Photo)

Sofia - The weather is cloudy and quiet in the mountains, the Mountain Rescue Service (MRS) told BTA. There is a danger of avalanches on the exposed areas.

There were no reports of accidents with tourists, the MRS added. The snow that has accumulated on the mountain parts is not great, the snow cover is about 15-20 cm.

The Weather on Jan. 30



St Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia (BTA Photo)

Significant clouds overnight. Light snow showers in some places in Northeast Bulgaria.

Scattered clouds, to increase again from the west in the evening. Light to moderate west-northwesterly wind. Lows: minus 4C to 1C. Highs: 0C to 5C. Highs in Sofia: around 2C.

The coast: Mostly significant clouds. Light to moderate west-northwesterly wind. Highs: between 2C and 4C. Seawater temperature: 8C to 9C. Sea waves: 1 to 2 degrees Douglas.

The mountains: Mostly significant clouds. Moderate northwesterly wind. Highs: minus 3C at 1,200 m, minus 7C at 2,000 m.

Source: National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology

Today's Observances: Jan. 30



Artwork by Dessi Toncheva (BTA Photo)

On this date in Bulgarian history:

1848: The maiden issue of Tsarigradski Vestnik, edited by Ivan Bogorov, Alexander Exarch and Todor Bourmov, comes out in Constantinople (folds on December 15, 1862).

1879: Bulgaria's first civilian hospital opens in Sofia.

2002: Intellectuals, power engineering workers and unionists set up a Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant Defence Committee in Pleven (North Central Bulgaria).

2007: Helios-Metalurg, Bulgaria's first steel mill set up entirely on private capital, opens in Plovdiv (South Central Bulgaria).

2007: An ordinance comes into force for the creation of a single general information portal about the management of EU structural and cohesion funds in Bulgaria.

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ENGLISH NEWS DEPARTMENT:

HEAD: Nadezhda Filipova

DEPUTY HEAD: Metodi Yordanov

SENIOR EDITORS: Diana Doukovska, Dimitrina Solakova, Lyubomir Gigov

TRANSLATION AND EDITING: Bistra Roushkova, Zhechka Dimitrova, Valentin Evstatiev, Petya Petrova, Desislava Toncheva, Matey Todorov, Roumen Yanovski, Yoanna Vodenova, Konstantin Karagyozev, Nikolay Zabov

Phone: (+359 2) 9262279

E-mail: dnews@bta.bg

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