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EU Finance Ministers Unanimously Back Bulgaria's Euro Adoption as of January 1, 2026



EU Commissioner for Economy and Productivity Valdis Dombrovskis (Photo: European Union)

Luxembourg - The EU Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) expressed its support for Bulgaria's euro area accession as of January 1, 2026, EU Economy and Productivity Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis said at the ECOFIN press conference in Luxembourg on Friday.

"I welcome today's ECOFIN decision supporting Bulgaria's euro accession as of January 1st, 2026. This is indeed a major milestone. So, now, this will pass for discussions to the European Council and then come back to the ECOFIN for a final decision at the July ECOFIN," Dombrovskis said after the ministers' meeting.

Polish Finance Minister Andrzej Domanski, who chaired Friday's meeting on behalf of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, specified that the finance

ministers adopted their decision unanimously.

ECOFIN is composed of the economics and finance ministers of the 27 EU Member States, as well as budget ministers when budgetary issues are discussed. The Council is responsible for EU policy in economic policy, taxation issues, and the regulation of financial services.

The [Eurogroup](#) on Thursday night endorsed a recommendation from euro area member states to the Council of the EU that Bulgaria should introduce the euro on January 1, 2026.

The recommendation is set to be adopted by the ECOFIN Council (by a qualified majority vote of the euro area member states) at its meeting on June 20. It is expected to endorse a letter to the European Council. The European Council will discuss the matter at its meeting on June 26-27.

The process will conclude on July 8 with the European Parliament's vote on its opinion and the adoption of the final decisions by the Council of the EU.

EU Council Approves Fiscal Expenditure Path for Bulgaria

Luxembourg - The EU Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) on Friday adopted recommendations endorsing the maximum net expenditure path for Bulgaria in the 2025-2028 period, as laid out in the country's National Medium-term Fiscal-structural Plan, the Council said in a press release published on its website.

Under the new economic governance framework (in force since end-April 2024), EU Member States are asked to submit national medium-term fiscal-structural plans which

cover 4 to 5 years. These plans contain Member States' fiscal expenditure path, together with envisaged reforms and investments. A key objective of the plans is to ensure that, by the end of the fiscal adjustment period, general government debt is on a plausibly downward trajectory, or stays at prudent levels, and that the government deficit is brought and maintained below the reference value of 3% of GDP over the medium term.

The net expenditure paths as set by the Council constitute the most important operational indicator for fiscal surveillance at EU level. This budgetary constraint will frame Bulgaria's national fiscal policies for next four to five years and help determine whether it is on a path towards achieving or maintaining healthy finances.

On February 27, 2025, Bulgaria submitted its National Medium-term Fiscal-structural Plan to the Council of the EU and the European Commission as drawn up by the Finance Ministry. The plan, drawn up by the Finance Ministry, covers the 2025–2028 period and presents a fiscal adjustment over four years. Under the plan, Bulgaria commits to an average net expenditure growth of 4.9% over the four-year period and a net cumulative expenditure growth of 21% from the base year 2024.

The net expenditure path committed to in the plan is to lead to a structural primary balance of -1.8% of GDP at the end of the adjustment period (2028).

The net expenditure commitments will be delivered mainly through discretionary revenue-increasing measures. On the revenue side, measures to improve compliance and prevent and counter tax fraud and evasion, are amongst the main elements supporting the fiscal targets.

Additional revenue measures are expected to yield increases in social contributions, including increases in the threshold of the maximum insurable income and planned increases in the length of service for retirement.

The plan refers to planned increases in excise duties on tobacco and tobacco products. There are no significant consolidation measures on the expenditure side, while further increases are planned in line with recent trends.

If the net expenditure path committed to in the plan and the underlying assumptions materialize, general government debt would gradually increase over the adjustment period from 24.2% in 2024 to 30.8% of GDP at the end of the adjustment period. Over the medium term, i.e. 10 years beyond the end of the adjustment period, this could imply a gradual increase in general government debt up to 45.3% in 2038.

Based on the plan's net expenditure path and assumptions, the general government deficit would be 3% in 2025 and would slightly decline to 2.9% of GDP over the adjustment period. Thus, according to the plan, the general government deficit would not exceed the 3% of GDP reference value at the end of the adjustment period (2028).

The plan describes policy intentions concerning reforms and investments to respond to the main challenges identified in the context of the European Semester, especially the country-specific recommendations, and to address the common EU priorities. The plan includes more than 120 reforms and investments addressing the common EU priorities of which more than 60 are financially supported by the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and 40 by the Cohesion policy funds (Multiannual Financial Framework).

Bulgaria's Finance Minister Thanks ECOFIN for Continuous Support on the Way to Euro Area



BTA Photo/Minko Chernev

Sofia - The European Commission and the ECB presented Friday the convergence reports for Bulgaria to the regular meeting of the EU Economic and Financial Affairs Council, which took place in Luxembourg, the Ministry of Finance reported. Finance Minister Temenuzhka Petkova attended the meeting.

The ministers [welcomed](#) the recommendation adopted by the Eurogroup for the introduction of the euro in Bulgaria from January 1, 2026. The President of ECOFIN sent a letter to the European Council on Bulgaria's accession to the euro area on January 1, 2026. Minister Petkova thanked for the objective assessment, as well as for the continuous support and constructive cooperation throughout the process of preparation for joining the euro area, the message said.

The Presidency presented a progress report on the Customs Union reform. Minister Petkova said that Bulgaria supports the main principles of the Customs Union reform package. The reform is a strategic response to the growing challenges faced by customs administrations and economic operators in an increasingly complex global environment.

In the framework of her visit to Luxembourg, Minister Petkova held a working meeting with Pierre Gramegna, Managing Director of the European Stability Mechanism, the release said.

European Parliament's Report on Bulgaria's Readiness to Adopt Euro to Go through Preliminary Vote June 24



EP building in Brussels (BTA Photo/Asen Tonev)

Brussels - The European Parliament's Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs and the Subcommittee on Tax Matters will vote on June 24 on the proposal for a report on Bulgaria's readiness to join the euro area at the beginning of next year. This is according to the agenda of the upcoming meeting. The rapporteur of the European Parliament is GERB/EPP MEP Eva Maydell.

The report is scheduled to be voted in the EP plenary in Strasbourg on July 8. On the same day, the EU Economic and Financial Affairs Council is expected to adopt the last legislative decisions related to the introduction of the euro in Bulgaria.

On Thursday, the Eurogroup decided unanimously to recommend to the EU Council to vote on a decision on Bulgaria's accession to the euro area from next year. Later in the day, the EU Council is expected to adopt this recommendation and send a letter to the European Council.

The European Council's opinion is expected next week.

Parliament Adopts Crypto-Asset Market Regulation Bill



National Assembly in session, at National Assembly building, Sofia, June 20, 2025 (BTA Photo/Nikola Uzunov)

Sofia - A bill transposing the EU's Markets in Crypto-Assets framework into national law, introducing oversight and regulation of crypto-asset markets and digital finance operational resilience, was adopted in Parliament on second reading Friday.

The legislation also establishes requirements for information accompanying transfers of funds and certain crypto-assets. It introduces measures to ensure the application of requirements set by European Union regulations on crypto-asset markets, as well as information accompanying transfers of funds and certain crypto-assets, and measures related to the operational resilience of digital technologies in the financial sector.

According to the adopted provisions, the law sets out the terms and procedures for the public offering of crypto-assets and their admission to trading on a crypto-asset trading platform, as well as the licensing and State supervision of crypto-asset issuers and crypto-asset service providers. It is specified that the law aims to protect the interests of crypto-asset holders and clients of crypto-asset service providers and to create conditions for the development of a transparent and efficient crypto-asset market.

The Financial Supervision Commission is to exercise oversight of compliance with the requirements of this law and its implementing acts, except in cases that fall under

the explicit competence of the Bulgarian National Bank.

An amendment tabled by Bozhidar Bozhanov of Continue the Change-Democratic Bulgaria, concerning judicial oversight in the removal of websites and advertising from online platforms, was rejected in the chamber.

Parliament Bans Sale of Energy Drinks to Children and Single-Use Vape Pens



BTA Photo/Milena Stoykova

Sofia - Parliament late on Thursday voted to ban conclusively a ban on the use, distribution, and sale of high-caffeine products (energy drinks) to children. Voting amendments to the Tobacco, Tobacco Products and Related Products Act, Parliament also made revised the Child Protection Act.

Prior to this, MPs banned the marketing of disposable electronic cigarettes, with or without nicotine – commonly referred to as disposable vapes. In addition, they banned the sale and distribution of products such as nicotine pouches and snus where the nicotine content exceeds 20 mg per unit. Nicotine-containing products that do not comply with the new legal requirements may continue to be sold for up to one month following the gazetting of amendments.

“You are banning disposable e-cigarettes, but allowing the use of reusable ones,” said MP Georgi Georgiev from Vazrazhdane. “You are introducing partial regulation, but the truth is that you misled the Bulgarian public,” he added.

The above-mentioned changes will come into force after the expiration of the objection period by the European Commission under Directive (EU) 2015/1535 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 September 2015, which

establishes a procedure for the provision of information in the field of technical regulations and rules concerning information society services.

Interior Ministry Will Not Allow Threats to People's Lives or Public Order, Minister Mitov Says



Interior Minister Daniel Mitov during Question Time, National Assembly, Sofia, June 20, 2025 (BTA Photo/Nikola Uzunov)

Sofia - The Interior Ministry will not restrict the right of Bulgarian citizens to protest, but violations of public order or threats to people's lives will not be allowed, Interior Minister Daniel Mitov said during Question Time in Parliament on Friday.

The reason for his words was a question from Vazrazhdane deputy floor leader, Petar Petrov, on an upcoming protest to preserve the Bulgarian lev.

Mitov replied that the security of the protest is the responsibility of the Security Police. However, if needed, additional Interior Ministry resources may be deployed at the discretion of the regional directorate's director.

There have been no incidents at recent protests; however, Mitov noted that responsibility lies with both parties, a view shared by Petrov.

In response to another question regarding the February 22 Vazrazhdane protest, after which police officers were reportedly required to give interviews, Mitov clarified that this was not initiated by the Interior Ministry's press service but was due to media inquiries.

The use of pepper spray at the February 22 protest in Sofia was appropriate and necessary. The order came from a senior official on site. There had been a violation of public order, an attack on police officers and bystanders in the

area, and an attack on the European Parliament building in Sofia, Mitov added.

Energy Minister, EC Executive Vice President Ribera Discuss Country's Energy Priorities



Photo: Council of Ministers

Sofia - Energy Minister Zhecho Stankov and European Commission Executive Vice President for a Clean, Fair and Competitive Transition Teresa Rivera discussed key priorities and challenges for the development of the energy sector in Bulgaria and the region.

Minister Stankov thanked Ribera for the productive and effective dialogue with the European Commission regarding the updated Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan. "Thanks to this cooperation, our country now has a clear vision for the sector's development, based on broad public consensus and solid, objective indicators," he emphasized.

He drew particular attention to the need for long-term and sustainable solutions for Bulgaria's coal regions, noting that lignite coal remains a critical component of national energy security during the transition period. "We are discussing the potential for co-firing lignite with biomass as a solution to reduce CO₂ emissions," Stankov said, underscoring the government's active efforts to develop a long-term decarbonization strategy.

The meeting also highlighted the development of Units 7 and 8 of Kozloduy N-power plant and the prospects for building four new pumped-storage hydropower plants as key elements of efforts to establish a secure, competitive, and sustainable energy system aligned with EU green objectives.

According to Minister Stankov, the Ministry of Energy aims to have Unit 7 of Kozloduy NPP operational by 2035, with Unit 8 to follow two years later. Both parties agreed that close cooperation with the European Commission is essential to ensure the successful and timely implementation of these strategic projects. "The projects for new pumped-storage hydropower plants, as well as the restoration of Chaira- the largest facility of its kind in the Balkans – are top priorities for the Ministry in ensuring the balancing of the electricity system," noted Stankov.

He noted that in the coming months, the preparation of all necessary documentation for the construction of the new facilities will begin. Various public-private partnership models are currently being explored for the implementation of these projects.

The meeting was also attended by Deputy Energy Minister Krasimir Nenov and Petyo Ivanov, Executive Director of Kozloduy NPP - New Builds.

Maritsa-East Mines Complex to Supply Nearly 50% of Energy for Household Consumers, Says Energy Minister



Maritsa East 2 Executive Director Diyan Dimitrov (left) and Energy Minister Zhecho Stankov at a briefing, Stara Zagora, June 21, 2025 (Stara Zagora Municipality Photo)

Radnevo, Southern Bulgaria - The Maritsa-East Mines Complex will supply nearly 50% of the electricity needed for household consumers in Bulgaria, Energy Minister Zhecho Stankov said Friday during a briefing at the Maritsa East 2 Thermal Power Plant.

Stankov noted that this guarantees the long-term

operation of the power plants in the region, ensuring the jobs of more than 6,000 people employed there.

"This once again proves that the heart of Bulgaria's energy system is here, in the Maritsa basin," the Minister said. He added that, as Minister of Energy, he is committed to securing the financial stability and long-term operation of the power stations.

"Following the liberalization of the wholesale electricity market, it is the state-owned energy sector that will provide electricity for household consumers through public tenders. This means our colleagues at the Maritsa-East complex will continue to ensure the country's energy stability by supplying nearly 50% of the electricity for residential needs," Stankov explained.

Democratic Bulgaria to Table Amendments Requiring Major Retail Chains to Publish Prices Daily



MP Bozhidar Bozhanov in Parliament, June 12 (BTA Photo/Blagoy Kirilov)

Sofia - Democratic Bulgaria is proposing amendments to the Consumer Protection Act that will require major retail chains to publish their prices daily, Yes, Bulgaria co-leader Bozhidar Bozhanov told journalists in Parliament on Friday.

"In this way, people will know what has gone up in price, they will be able to compare, and we will all have access to up-to-date data," Bozhanov explained.

The idea is to that by mid-next year, these data to be published on the retailers' websites and also sent to the Ministry of Economy and Industry, which will aggregate and share the information with the public. According to Bozhanov, this approach will allow price gougers to be identified instantly.

He said that retailers cannot be required to disclose the prices at which they purchase goods, as that constitutes commercial secrecy.

Bozhanov also accused the National Revenue Agency of scaremongering with statements suggesting widespread price hikes. "The only way to prevent prices from rising is through competition," he said, justifying the proposed legal measures.

A national database should be created so that everyone can see the prices of basic products in each retail chain, said Martin Dimitrov, MP of Continue the Change – Democratic Bulgaria. According to him, this leads to strong competition and is the only real guarantee that prices will rise more slowly or not at all. He pointed said such a measure exists in Croatia.

Dimitrov criticized left-wing proposals such as state-run shops, saying they would drive prices up. "The profit margin of big chains is protected by those who want to cap markups—this will actually lead to higher prices," he explained. He also noted that GERB and MRF–New Beginning have been considering similar ideas.

Ivaylo Mirchev, co-chair of Yes, Bulgaria, claimed that Rumen Spetsov, head of the National Revenue Agency, acted like "a PR agent for Delyan Peevski".

Commenting on Thursday's Eurogroup meeting in Luxembourg, where a recommendation was approved for Bulgaria to join the eurozone next year, Mirchev stated that thanks to their efforts, GERB had requested a convergence report, bringing Bulgaria closer to adopting the euro.

Vazrazhdane Asks Velichie and MECh to Sign No-Confidence Motion over Country's Finances

Sofia - Vazrazhdane asks Velichie and MECh to support their motion of no confidence in the government over its perceived failure in finance policy, MP Tsoncho Ganev (Vazrazhdane) said in the parliamentary lobby on Friday.

"Today we will send official invitations to Velichie and MECh to support the motion of no confidence we would like to introduce on a topic which will affect the future of the country, because joining the eurozone is exactly that. We count on their signatures to be able to table the motion over the country's finances, its financial stability and failure to meet revenue targets," Ganev explained.

"For nearly two months Vazrazhdane has been working on

a proposal for a motion of no confidence against the government. Unfortunately, there is no other opposition force in parliament that has signed it, but us," Ganev added. For the motion to be debated and voted on in parliament, the necessary signatures must be collected, "but Velichie and MECh refuse to sign the proposal," he said.

"On Thursday, National Revenue Agency Executive Director Rumen Spetsov declared in a TV interview that a noticeable spike in the small consumer basket prices had been noted, yet the National Statistics declares zero inflation," Ganev argued in favour of Vazrazhdane's request for a no-confidence vote. He said that the overall economic stability of the country is not good. As proof, he quoted data released by the Finance Ministry a few days ago showing that there is already a deficit and revenue is less than planned and expenditure more than planned.

Velichie Will Back Vazrazhdane's No-Confidence Motion If Vazrazhdane Back Theirs



Krasimira Katincharova, MP of Velichie (BTA Photo/Vladimir Shokov)

Sofia - The Velichie parliamentary group will support a no-confidence motion against the government initiated by the Vazrazhdane group if Vazrazhdane supports a similar motion by Velichie, MP Krasimira Katincharova (Velichie) said on Friday. The topic of Vazrazhdane's motion will be the government's perceived failure in finance policy, and Velichie will hold the incumbents responsible for what the group sees as a failure in ecology.

Katincharova was commenting on [Vazrazhdane's statement earlier in the day](#) that they will ask Velichie and MECh to support their motion.

She said that Velichie's motion will be centred on the issue of unregulated landfills. She said that, instead of worrying

about a looming environmental disaster in Iran, Vazrazhdane leader Kostadin Kostadinov should be concerned with the unregulated landfills scattered around 10% of Bulgaria's territory.

Velichie are optimistic they can find common ground with Vazrazhdane. "We are in favour of any vote of no confidence in this government because it is harmful to Bulgaria," Katincharova said.

Economy Minister Dilov Meets Cuban Ambassador to Discuss Deeper Trade Links



Meeting between Economy Minister Dilov and the Ambassador of the Republic of Cuba to Bulgaria Marieta Garcia Jordan, Ministry of Economy, Sofia, June 20, 2025 (Ministry of Economy and Industry Photo)

Sofia - Minister of Economy and Industry Peter Dilov and Ambassador of the Republic of Cuba to Bulgaria Marieta Garcia Jordan discussed opportunities to deepen bilateral trade and strengthen economic cooperation, the Ministry of Economy said in a press release on Friday. The meeting focused on achieving more tangible progress in relations between the two countries.

The possibilities for expanding bilateral trade and economic cooperation were discussed. Dilov noted the significant growth in bilateral trade in 2024, which has increased by more than 46% compared with the previous year. "It is necessary to seek opportunities to diversify products by focusing on those with higher added value," he said.

For her part, Garcia Jordan underlined the long-standing tradition of friendly relations between the two countries.

Both agreed that opportunities exist for mutually beneficial cooperation in a number of areas, including in line with Bulgaria's membership in the European Union and the Republic of Cuba's membership in the Latin American Integration Association and other regional organizations.

The meeting was also attended by Deputy Ministers of Economy and Industry Nevena Lazarova and Doncho Barbalov.

Sports Minister Peshev Meets with Cuban Ambassador



Photo: Ministry of Sports and Youth

Sofia - Bilateral relations between Bulgaria and Cuba serve as a tool for cooperation, a means of strengthening cultural dialogue, and a platform for sharing experience and ideas in the fields of sports, culture, and youth development, Youth Minister Ivan Peshev said during a meeting here with Cuban Ambassador to Bulgaria, Marieta García Jordan, quoted by his ministry.

The meeting focused on opportunities for cooperation in sports, exchange of experience and best practices between the two countries. Discussions also included prospects for joint initiatives, sporting events, and youth sports development programs, as well as options for training exchanges between coaches and athletes.

“Combating addictions among children and adolescents is a priority in our work. It is essential to ensure the best possible conditions for the future realization of young people, for engaging their free time constructively, and for supporting their active role in public and social life,” Minister Peshev said.

This year marks the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Cuba.

“This important milestone is another reason to strive for deeper cooperation and mutual understanding between our two countries,” said Ambassador Marieta García Jordan.

Bulgarian President and EU Ambassadors Discuss War, EU Economy and Euro Area Membership



President Rumen Radev meets with EU ambassadors towards the close of the Polish Presidency of the EU Council. Sofia, June 20, 2025 (Photo: The President's Administration)

Sofia - President Rumen Radev and the ambassadors of the EU member states to Bulgaria discussed the ongoing wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, the future of the EU economy and the expected euro changeover in Bulgaria, Radev's press secretariat reported on Friday.

The meeting was held days before the expiry of the six-month Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. It took place at the Polish Embassy in Sofia. The diplomats raised questions about the combat action in Europe's proximity and its implications, matters on the international agenda and issues of current importance for Bulgarian society.

Radev described the ongoing wars in the Middle East and Ukraine as key challenges to international security requiring consistent efforts to halt the fighting and resolve the respective situations by diplomatic means. “Each of these military conflicts holds the risk of expanding, of even greater destruction and loss of human lives, and therefore it is necessary to coordinate the approaches of the EU and the US to resolve the conflicts as soon as possible. The combat action in regions neighbouring the EU calls for setting priority on ensuring European security and strengthening the bloc's defence capabilities,” he said, adding that it is exceedingly important how related resources are invested.

Discussing the EU economy, the President said the big challenge is to boost the bloc's production and competitiveness in order to reinforce its economy and

enhance the stability of the welfare systems.

Radev said that his proposal for a referendum on Bulgaria's preparedness to join the euro area in 2026, [which was rejected](#), triggered a long-due debate on the real readiness of the country's institutions, businesses and society for such a fundamental step. He said the public expects concrete steps and mechanisms to counter an unwarranted increase in prices, which, according to him, has already begun, as was the case in other EU member states. "Holding a national referendum is also a way to restore public confidence in the institutions after Bulgaria conducted seven parliamentary elections in four years and citizens were alienated from the political process," he argued.

The President identified anti-corruption, justice and the rule of law, education, agriculture and transport infrastructure development as the main areas in which Bulgarians expect real reforms to improve the functioning of public institutions and positive changes in the public environment in Bulgaria.

Consultative Council for National Security Could Be Reconvened about Middle East Conflict, President Radev Says



BTA Photo/Nikolay Venkov

If necessary, the Consultative Council for National Security (CCNS) could be reconvened because of the war in the Middle East, President Rumen Radev told journalists in Tryavna.

"Of course there are risks, they are assessed every single day, in real time. Our services are working very intensively on the spot," the Head of State added. He reminded that

the Security Council had already been convened on the same occasion - an exchange of strikes between Israel and Iran, in October 2024.

"If necessary, the council could be convened again, but I expect the proposals and opinions we adopted by consensus the last time around to be fully implemented because there are two points that have not yet been implemented," Radev added.

The President also said that until a few days ago he had not received any written requests for a Secretary General of the Ministry of Interior.

"I have finally received a request for coordination on the appointment of a secretary general and I will soon take a position on this issue," Radev explained.

On June 13, Prime Minister Rosen Zhelyazkov announced from Austria that there had been verbal coordination on the appointment of a secretary general of the Ministry of Interior and these are topics that remain open. It is not correct to mention names on any occasion, Zhelyazkov said at the time.

Earlier in the day, the Head of State's press secretariat said that the presidential institution had not received a written proposal to coordinate the appointment of a general secretary of the Interior Ministry.

The President also commented on the information about the increase in the prices of goods and the insistence of the National Revenue Agency to return the values to the levels of June 3:

"Two weeks were enough to convince people that the state is helpless in the face of the unjustified price hikes," Rumen Radev said.

"Instead of developing theories every day in the studios and raising slogans, the government should think immediately about what will happen to people from vulnerable social groups in the event of such a rise in inflation," Radev added.

"I expect to see serious measures in this regard, because you see that the war in the Middle East is also raising oil prices, and that cannot help but have an impact on every family's budget. Bulgarians should not be miserable," the President added.

He reiterated his thesis that the referendum (on joining the eurozone - ed.) is the only way to restore confidence in the institutions and strengthen the statehood.

Radev also responded to criticism from GERB leader Boyko Borissov about the head of state's travels.

"About what is being done abroad - if anyone owes an account, it is former Prime Minister Borissov for his international contracts," Radev said.

He added that after his visits to Japan and the Middle East and the agreements signed, he expects the government to translate these bilateral agreements into real investment, cultural and educational exchanges.

VP Iotova on Middle East Conflict: Bulgaria's Preparation Should Focus Mostly on Border Security



Vice President Iliana Iotova in Chirpan, South Central Bulgaria (BTA Photo/Emil Dimov)

Chirpan, South Central Bulgaria - Bulgaria's preparations at present should be focused primarily on the security of its borders, Vice President Iliana Iotova said in Chirpan, Southcentral Bulgaria, in connection with reports that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees is preparing for possible large groups of refugees from Iran. Bulgaria already has experience in this regard following the conflict in Syria in 2011, but from now on, the situation in the Middle East requires very careful work not only on the part of the Bulgarian government, but also on the part of European institutions, she said.

"I have always had serious reservations and criticisms of the new migration pact because, in my opinion, it does not work, will not work, and will create difficulties," Iotova commented. She expressed hope that events would prove her opinion wrong. "However, as someone who has worked on the issue of migration in European structures for a long time, I believe that new decisions must be taken in this extremely difficult situation that is developing," said the Vice President.

Iliana Iotova expressed hope for secure borders in Bulgaria's neighboring countries. "I really hope for secure borders for our neighbors, because we are already seeing very disturbing reports from the border between Türkiye and Iran, where entire families are trying to move," she added.

Iotova is in Chirpan for this year's Lavender Festival.

Foreign Ministry Advises Bulgarian Nationals to Stay Out of, Leave 11 Mideast Countries



The head office of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Sofia (Foreign Ministry Photo)

Sofia - In connection with the abrupt deterioration of the security situation in the Middle East, the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry on Friday called on Bulgarian nationals to avoid non-essential travel to 11 countries in the region and travel there only where urgently necessary.

The advisory concerns Iraq, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.

It is advisable for Bulgarians, including short-term residents who are already in the listed countries, to consider an option to leave promptly in case their stay there is not crucially necessary, the press release said.

The Ministry urged Bulgarian nationals travelling to, or staying in, the listed countries to register at the Bulgarian diplomatic mission concerned and, to this end, provide their contact details. This will be essential for quick and adequate assistance by the diplomatic missions in case of emergency.

Vice President Iotova: Very Serious Public Debate Needed on Pros and Cons of Introducing the Euro



Vice President Iliana Iotova in Chirpan, Southcentral Bulgaria (BTA Photo/Emil Dimov)

Chirpan, Southcentral Bulgaria - A serious public debate is needed on the pros and cons of introducing the euro, the risks involved and how they should be overcome, Vice President Iliana Iotova said in Chirpan, Southcentral Bulgaria, where she is attending this year's Lavender Festival.

According to her, two things are quite alarming. One of them is the announcement by the National Revenue Agency (NRA) that only two weeks after the positive convergence reports, there has been a significant increase in prices in Bulgaria. "Today, the executive director of the NRA, Rumen Spetsov, used the word 'speculation,'" Iotova said, reminding that the fight against speculation was one of the reasons President Rumen Radev gave for holding a referendum on the euro adoption. She pointed out that Bulgarian citizens must be sure that inflation will not rise sharply, that there will be no serious price increases, and that incomes will largely be able to compensate for any price increases.

The second worrying fact is the possibility of tax increases next year, the Vice President added. "It is no coincidence that the chairman of the Fiscal Council and former finance minister Simeon Dyankov spoke about the need to increase the value-added tax (VAT) and it is no coincidence that he brought up the old topic of increasing the excess profits of banks," Iliana Iotova noted. According to her, these are the "first probes" that the majority is making with a view to an upcoming tax increase.

The Vice President emphasized that public discussion is necessary because Bulgaria continues to be the country with the lowest income in the European Union, with the highest threshold of poverty risk for the population, and

because the country has not yet reached even the average income level within the EU. "Instead of a lot of noise and PR, it is better to get answers to these very questions," Iotova said. She expressed the opinion that a sincere and honest conversation with Bulgarian society, even in this situation, could reassure people.

According to Iotova, the news that the EU Council on Economic and Financial Affairs (ECOFIN) supported Bulgaria's accession to the eurozone at the beginning of next year were expected. The pre-planned procedure is being followed, and the decision of the EU Council is also expected, she said. Iliana Iotova noted that she does not expect any changes or surprises—the most important thing was the convergence reports, and from there on, the path is formal.

She also noted that for an important decision such as the adoption of the euro, the people should have been asked. The people were denied the opportunity and the right to be asked, she said. "It is clear that the ruling majority tried to suggest that we Bulgarians are not smart enough to understand all the pros and cons of introducing the euro. This humiliation we are suffering at the hands of those in power cannot be explained and cannot be justified," said the Vice President.

National Forum Discusses Effect of Eurozone Membership based on Lessons from Member States



National discussion at the Council of Ministers on "The Effect of the Eurozone: Lessons from Member States", Sofia, June 20, 2025 (BTA Photo/Nikola Uzunov)

Sofia - A national discussion was held at the Council of Ministers Friday on "The Effect of the Eurozone: Lessons from Member States". The forum was organized by the

Economic and Social Council of Bulgaria and is part of the country's Communication Strategy for Information and Publicity of Bulgaria's Accession to the Euro Area.

The benefits and potential risks for the public of introducing the euro in Bulgaria were discussed by representatives of various institutions and experts.

Opening the forum, [Prime Minister Rosen Zhelyazkov](#) said that State authorities are on site, monitoring price dynamics and will seek explanations for any unjustified increases in the prices of certain goods. "This has nothing to do with the euro itself, since we don't yet use the euro. However, the mere information that we may adopt it has encouraged certain market players to take proactive steps," he commented. He assured that the public information campaign will not be politically driven or propaganda, but will provide reliable, factual content to address both public fears and concerns, while helping society make informed predictions. The goal, he noted, is to create a predictable market environment that will allow the positive effects and benefits of the euro to be implemented. In the Prime Minister's view, regulatory authorities must exercise their powers effectively in the coming months to ensure that market distortions are prevented, regardless of their causes.

In his address, [Interior Minister Daniel Mitov](#) said that the process of joining the eurozone is not only an economic and financial challenge, but also an opportunity to build a more resilient, efficient, and secure State, along with a more dynamic and active economy. Minister Mitov underscored that the success of the euro adoption process depends on the active involvement and awareness of the entire society. "I believe that trust in institutions is an irreplaceable element of this process, and that trust is built through transparent actions and open, active communication with the public," the Minister noted. He added that the Ministry of Interior will continue to carry out its responsibilities with a strong commitment to security and public peace.

[Deputy Finance Minister Galia Dimitrova](#) said that the introduction of the euro is not merely a currency changeover, it is a guarantee of stability, trust, and sustainable economic development. Dimitrova highlighted the many significant benefits of adopting the euro. The elimination of currency risk and the reduction in transaction costs will support both businesses and citizens. "We expect an increase in foreign investment, improved national competitiveness, and more favorable financing conditions for the state," she said. She also noted that the adoption of the euro will indirectly lead to better performance by public institutions, helping to raise their standards to the level of the most developed EU countries. Furthermore, it will strengthen Bulgaria's role in shaping Eurozone policy,

including in the area of monetary policy. "One of our top priorities is ensuring consumer protection during the currency changeover," she added.

[Zornitsa Rusinova, Chair of the Economic and Social Council \(ESC\)](#), said that civic oversight is one of the most reliable ways to counteract speculative price increases during the process of adopting the euro. She called on citizens to be active, especially in light of the upcoming dual price labeling in lev and euro starting August 8, 2025. She emphasized that if consumers notice significant price changes on certain products within a short period, they should immediately report it to the Commission for Protection of Competition, the Commission for Consumer Protection, or even local authorities. Rusinova also recalled that the ESC will launch an extensive information campaign covering the technical aspects of euro adoption, including currency exchange procedures, and urged citizens not to rush to exchange their levs but to wait for the official transition to the new currency.

[Bulgarian National Bank Deputy Governor Petar Chobanov](#) expressed confidence that the transition to the euro will proceed smoothly. He added that Bulgaria must leverage its eurozone membership to achieve these new opportunities. Chobanov underscored that the top priority of the central bank is price stability. "We have two examples in the EU of currency boards – Estonia and Lithuania - which successfully joined the eurozone without major shocks, without changing their orientation towards maintaining fiscal and financial stability. Therefore, we have every reason to believe that we will continue our efforts in this direction and remain an example of fiscal policy, which also justified us being one of the few countries to meet the criteria without exceptions and to maintain the second lowest public debt level in the EU," Chobanov said.

[One of the discussion panels](#) was on the impact of Eurozone membership on competitiveness and investment. The panel was moderated by Georgi Simeonov, Co-chairman of the Tax and Legal Committee at the Confederation of Employers and Industrialists in Bulgaria.

Daniela Bobeva from the Institute for Economic Research at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences highlighted the benefits of increased transparency in business operations. "Data shows that it will become much more difficult for businesses to operate in the grey economy. Prices themselves don't rise, someone raises them. Why? Businesses need to understand that raising prices may cost them their competitiveness," Bobeva said.

The Secretary General of the Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association, Milena Angelova, emphasized that Eurozone membership would slow Bulgaria's debt accumulation.

According to her, the most recent countries to adopt the euro experienced only minimal inflationary effects.

Stanislav Popdonchev, Deputy Chair and Chief Financial Officer of BIA, underscored the importance of implementing measures to protect the most vulnerable groups in society.

Sonya Dimitrova, Head of the European Affairs and Policies Directorate at the Ministry of Finance, said that eurozone accession would lead to an upgrade in Bulgaria's credit rating and make the country more attractive to investors.

Marinela Petrova, an adviser at the Bulgarian National Bank, addressed some practical concerns related to timing and euro cash availability. "If businesses forecast accurately, there should be no issue with euro liquidity," she said. Petrova reminded that businesses are required to return change in euros during the dual currency circulation period—unless they have no euro cash on hand, in which case an exception can be made.

[Another discussion panel](#) looked at the impact of eurozone adoption on incomes and prices, along with the role of regulators in curbing speculation during Bulgaria's transition to the euro.

"We are standing on the threshold of a historic event – to join the European family with dignity in all its aspects," said Rumen Spetsov, Executive Director of the National Revenue Agency. Spetsov described the Agency as a protective barrier serving Bulgarian consumers and noted that it conducts checks on whether traders are raising prices unjustifiably. Spetsov explained that it is normal for people to have concerns when the reasons and mechanisms behind certain processes are unclear. He noted that there may be speculation and disinformation, but regulators are working together and the State is taking all necessary steps to inform the public about requirements. "Every citizen and business must understand their rights and obligations and review both their business activities and personal finances," Spetsov said.

Chair of the Commission on Protection of Competition Rossen Karadimov noted that they had undertaken a careful analysis of the powers of each regulator, and through mutual agreements, information exchanges, expertise, and joint action, aimed to multiply the effect of each regulator's remit. He called this approach key, as each body has specific powers in its own area. Without synchronisation, information collected by each regulator remains within its own scope, Karadimov said. He added, "If we achieve synchronisation—as we managed uniquely well with colleagues over the past 10–15 days—the multiplying effect of those powers becomes extremely significant."

Karadimov noted the importance of inspection data, especially for local retail chains and markets.

Maria Filipova, Chair of the Commission on Consumer Protection, said that the principles of cooperation between the Consumer Protection Commission, the Competition Commission, and the National Revenue Agency centre on protecting consumers through preventive action. She explained that such measures include the launch of an information website, a mobile application, and an informational campaign.

Plamen Dimitrov, President of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB), announced that CITUB will continue its independent research on the cost of living and the required monthly income, including for the basic consumer basket. This research, previously conducted quarterly, will now be performed monthly for at least the next 12 months to ensure continuous monitoring of price trends. Commenting on "interpretations" by economists who claim there is no problem in setting extremely high prices if someone is willing to pay, Dimitrov said, "That is not right – especially for essentials and the 20 key basket items on which people physically depend." He added that regulators must ensure a fair market price, particularly for goods and services critical to people's survival.

Economist Atanas Pekanov noted that while prices are a major concern for the public, regulators must act to prevent unjustified practices. He said wage growth should be a priority if Bulgaria is to approach Western European living standards. "This has not always happened at the pace we want. Our goal is to see income levels in Bulgaria match those of the most advanced economies," Pekanov noted.

[A third discussion panel](#) looked at the benefits and potential risks for the public of introducing the euro in Bulgaria.

Deputy Interior Minister Filip Popov noted that, at the international level, the Ministry of Interior is actively participating in a number of coordinated initiatives and operational meetings with representatives of partner institutions from European Union member states as well as with key international organizations. He said that a major focus of this cooperation is the exchange of information, best practices, and analyses related to trends and emerging threats in the field of currency counterfeiting. Popov explained that, regarding logistics and security for transporting and distributing euro banknotes and coins, the Ministry of Interior collaborates closely with the Bulgarian National Bank and the security services of the European Central Bank. According to the established plan, monthly meetings are held at both national and local levels with

representatives of banking institutions. In coordination with the Bulgarian National Bank, security measures are implemented for facilities and the secure transport of cash within the country.

Ivaylo Ivanov, Governor of the National Social Security Institute (NSSI), emphasized that the transition from the lev to the euro must be carried out with as little difficulty as possible for social security system clients. Ivanov assured that the more favourable rules for recalculating pensions will be applied. We have already adapted our information systems to accommodate this change. With the decrees updating pensions by 8.6% effective July 1, 2025, all pension amounts will be recalculated and displayed in euros. This will give individuals a six-month period to familiarize themselves with the new amounts and know precisely what their pension will be in euros in 2026, when payments will be made exclusively in euros. Ivanov noted that approximately 40% of pensioners do not receive their pensions via bank transfers and assured that they will continue to receive their pensions in euro without any disruption. He confirmed that all social payments will be delivered to recipients on time and in full, even after the currency transition.

Deputy Executive Director of Bulgarian Posts Stanimir Belinov announced, "We have organized an information campaign, as our currency exchange services from leva to euro will be offered in smaller communities where bank branches are unavailable."

Lydia Shouleva, member of the Managing Board of the Council of Women in Business in Bulgaria and member of the Economic and Social Council, pointed out that one of the most widespread rumours is that after January 2026, leva will be exchanged at a rate of 1 to 3, instead of at the fixed rate. Shouleva said that this rumour had forced many people to exchange their money prematurely, resulting in considerable losses. She explained that these losses occur because, after Bulgaria enters the eurozone, the money in bank accounts will be converted automatically. Shouleva also drew attention to the elderly, who keep a large part of their savings at home. She urged them to deposit these funds in banks, where the money will be automatically converted after January 1, 2026. Shouleva added that another widespread rumour is that loan interest rates will change after eurozone entry. She said these rates will remain at their current levels.

Prices on Certain Goods Spike in Specific Regions – National Revenue Agency Chief



National Revenue Agency Executive Director Rumen Spetsov (BTA Photo/Nikola Uzunov)

Sofia - There has been a noticeable spike in the prices of certain goods in specific regions, National Revenue Agency Executive Director Rumen Spetsov told journalists on Friday at the Council of Ministers.

Spetsov said that the data he presented on Thursday regarding the price increases were "initial and raw" and have since undergone further analysis.

"Today, we have much more detailed data, which clearly provides a full picture of the prices and where increases occur," he said. Spetsov emphasized that the first step will be to present these findings to the regulatory authorities - the Commission for Protection of Competition and the Commission for Consumer Protection.

"We'll hold a joint meeting to review the data and analyses so we can coordinate our next actions," Spetsov explained, adding that the observed price increases follow a distinct territorial pattern.

"There is no across-the-board price surge of the kind I cited yesterday based on raw figures. We are seeing clear regional trends in the price hikes from specific retailers, so we can't talk about inflationary processes. This is pure speculation," Spetsov said.

He assured that specific data will be released today or by Monday at the latest.

Spetsov participated in a discussion on "The Effect of the Eurozone: Lessons from Member States," held at the

Council of Ministers.

Green Transition Forum 5.0 Day 5



Transforming Higher Education through Innovation and Scientific Research panel discussion at Green Transition Forum 5.0, June 20, 2025 (BTA Photo/Hristo Kassabov)

Sofia - Various topics took centre stage on the last day of the Green Transition Forum 5.0. The forum took place at the Sofia Event Center and is organized by the Green Transition Forum and Dir.bg, with the Bulgarian News Agency as media partner. Among the central topic were the needs of innovators, innovation as a cornerstone of EU and CEE competitiveness, digitalization of industries and services, transforming higher education through innovation and scientific research, and competitiveness, economic development and effective public-private partnerships as a benchmark for the CEE region.

Participants in the session **From Policy to Practice: What European Innovators Need** outlined the main challenges and necessary steps. The conditions for the successful development of European innovators and their business models require targeted actions, clear priorities and a supportive environment, the speakers said. The speakers at Friday's session united around the need for a favorable environment for emerging and developing businesses.

"The question is how to accelerate innovation," Irina Obushtarova, co-founder and strategic advisor at The Recursive, said. According to her, unnecessary barriers should be avoided, and policies should be aimed at creating better conditions for innovators.

Svetoslava Georgieva, Chair of the EIC Fund, said the goal is to implement investments as quickly as possible. "2.1 billion is the amount that our colleagues from the European Investment Bank have already negotiated," she said. According to her, the fund is becoming one of the largest investors in Europe, with the planned funds reaching nearly

EUR 5 billion.

Stefan Tzalov, investment manager at the European Investment Fund, emphasized the growth and good liquidity of enterprises. "So far, we have invested over EUR 45 billion across Europe," he said. One of the problems, according to him, is the insufficient liquidity of stock exchanges, which makes it difficult to secure capital. In Central and Eastern Europe, access to capital is difficult, which is why many companies migrate to Western Europe and the US at an early stage of their development, Tzalov explained. The fund's team is developing partnerships in Central and Eastern Europe, the Baltic and Scandinavian countries, he added.

Innovation as a Cornerstone of EU and CEE Competitiveness

The capacity of private funds is immense, said Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Innovation and Growth Tomislav Donchev. According to Donchev, there is a lack of public momentum and meaningful dialogue around the new economy. "There is no conversation happening about the new economy," he said, emphasizing that while the drive for success is a powerful force, how and when society discusses and motivates it remains unclear. He argued that society traditionally lacks the courage needed for such discussions. Donchev said that artificial intelligence (AI) will be one of the key drivers of competitiveness for the economies that adopt it wisely, but warned that it will also bring significant disruptions to the labour market. "There are serious questions – what professional opportunities will be available for people affected by AI? But those who use it will have the advantage," he noted. He added that while Europe focuses on regulating new technologies, the US and China are heavily investing in the latest models. "I'm not saying there should be no regulation," Donchev clarified, "but we need a balance between control and innovation." "I wish we were bolder," he said. Donchev acknowledged that skepticism toward progress is natural, especially when it comes to creative destruction, but insisted that Europe needs to step out of its comfort zone when talking about the future. "Fear is not a shelter or a safe place," he concluded.

The goals of the Green Deal should stay the same, but the economy competitiveness should be maintained as well, along with supporting startups and developing companies in Europe, said EU Commissioner for Startups, Research, and Innovation Ekaterina Zaharieva. Discussions about the Green Deal are decreasing in Brussels, creating the impression that the new European Commission is retreating from its ambitions, added Zaharieva, confirming this statement is not true. The focus is now on how to achieve the goals with a more pragmatic approach. "I believe this is

the right approach, because common sense will dampen the voices of populists," Zaharieva commented. She stressed that the Green Deal's objectives cannot be fulfilled without ensuring the sustainable competitiveness of the European economy. One of the main challenges remains the fragmentation of the European market. "We still haven't completed the construction of the EU single market," Zaharieva said. Overcoming at least part of the fragmentation and promoting the creation of large-scale investment funds to retain innovative companies in Europe should be a priority over the next five years. The Bulgarian EU Commissioner expressed satisfaction with the May 28 presentation of a comprehensive startup strategy. This strategy aims to make Europe the best place to launch and grow an innovative business by focusing on improved access to financing, easier market entry, talent attraction and retention, simplified regulations, and access to infrastructure for innovators. "High technology and leadership in this field will be the number one priority for all governments worldwide. I can assure you that the European Commission, and I personally, are determined to do everything possible to help our innovators choose Europe," Zaharieva emphasized.

Digitalization of Industries and Services

Digitalization is one of key drivers of the green transition and sustainable economic development, said E-Government Minister Valentin Mundrov. In the context of accelerated technological progress and global challenges, the potential of information and communication technologies and their prudent application are key to successfully achieving the goals of the digital transition, Mundrov said. Mundrov emphasized that the Ministry of e-Government has a clear vision to build a secure and efficient infrastructure and to implement policies focused on citizens and businesses. This inevitably includes digitalization as a foundation for modernization and sustainability. "Digital transformation creates conditions for easier and faster interaction between the state and business, which is a main priority for the Ministry," he noted. He added that the challenges are significant, society expects fast and accessible services, requiring the adoption of innovative solutions. In this direction, the Ministry is developing a comprehensive digital architecture for the state administration. Among specific initiatives, he mentioned the implementation of a unified model for requesting electronic services, automatic data exchange between institutions, operational interoperability, integrated architectural solutions, cloud infrastructure, and an electronic identification system. Mundrov said his Ministry is working on several key areas, including on creating digital infrastructure, facilitating data access, increasing transparency and accountability, as well as integration with the private sector through compatible platforms and standards that support automation and

traceability.

Facilitating the internationalization of Bulgarian small and medium-sized businesses is the primary role of the Bulgarian Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion Agency (BSMEPA), Executive Director Boyko Takov said. Takov said the aim is for Bulgarian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to be well positioned on the global stage and to find new partners and clients. At the same time, the agency is launching two new projects related to digitalization. One is focused on Northern Bulgaria and envisages the creation of mobile offices, with the World Bank being a partner in this project. Another project relates to cross-border cooperation with Serbia, within which many SMEs will be supported. "Digitalization is a key factor in the competitiveness of enterprises," Takov said. He noted that the agency is also actively working on the development of innovation. At present, BSMEPA manages the Eurostars programme under the Eureka initiative, and another innovation project is due to be launched soon.

Transforming Higher Education through Innovation and Scientific Research

Leading experts from the education and scientific sectors discussed the challenges facing education.

Council of Rectors Chair Miglena Temelkova said that the biggest challenge for any educational institution is how to prepare students for jobs of the future that may not even exist in the next 10, 15, or 20 years. She stressed that today's students must be educated in an interdisciplinary manner, rather than only as specialists in a single field.

Bulgarian Academy of Sciences President Evelina Slavcheva highlighted the importance of fundamental knowledge and scientific research. "No matter how inspiring innovations are, they require a foundation - fundamental knowledge and fundamental scientific research," she said. Slavcheva noted that new technologies often capture public attention, but behind them lie long-term and less visible scientific studies that demand time, silence, and in-depth work.

Former innovation minister Milena Stoycheva (2023-2024) emphasized the need for a responsible approach to new technologies. "Artificial intelligence (AI) is simply the new, next wave of high technology. Just like the internet was before, now it is AI," she said. Stoycheva called for a long-term vision in the field of AI and stressed the importance of considering the impact of this technology over the next one or two decades.

Academic Director of Master's Programmes at the American University in Bulgaria, Momtchil Karpouzanov, expressed

concerns about the use of AI in education. "I am personally very critical of the overly liberal approach that many of our students might take. With every wave of enthusiasm, critical thinking becomes even more essential," he said.

Competitiveness, Economic Development and Effective Public-Private Partnerships as a Benchmark for the CEE region

Bulgaria and Greece are good trading partners in the Balkans and in the last year Bulgaria has turned out to be the fourth most important destination for Greece's exports., Panagiotis Theodorikakos, Minister of Development of Greece, said.

According to Theodorikakos, the relations between Bulgaria and Greece are friendly and this is an economic-political process that is needed. "We should share our common desires for the prosperity of the whole region," he noted.

Theodorikakos focused on the Greek economy, noting that it is currently growing at a rate 2% higher than the euro area average. "Unemployment is the lowest in decades, taxes have been cut and throughout this period we have continued to overcome the consequences of the crisis and Greece as a whole is reducing its public debt," he said.

According to him, the development of humanity is currently in a period of instability around the world especially in regions that are close to Bulgaria and Greece.

Giorgos Kremlis, Ambassador of the European Public Law Organisation to Bulgaria, said that the Green Transition Forum is growing year by year in terms of its scope and importance and in that it is attracting more and more high-profile guests and speakers. "It is a multidisciplinary forum that discusses the challenges we face in the region, in our neighbouring countries. It provides knowledge, expertise, best practices and these are shared among all 30 countries whose representatives have participated in the conference so far, he said.

He said countries should do more to develop green energy.

Former Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev also joined the discussion, saying that cooperation should be strengthened by the countries of the region. "It is clear that if we want to avoid being on the periphery in this dramatically changing world, we need to cooperate, find common points and have a strong voice in Brussels," Stanishev said. "If we want Europe to be successful, our voice has to be taken into account in the policies that are changing at the moment, otherwise we will be isolated," he added.

Renewables Increasing Need for Efficient Energy Storage, Says Expert



Chamber of Engineers in the Investment Design's Sliven Regional College Chair Ivaylo Videv

Sliven, Southeastern Bulgaria - The increasing production of energy from renewable sources poses the challenge of storing surplus energy, Chamber of Engineers in the Investment Design's Sliven Regional College Chair Ivaylo Videv told Bulgarian News Agency's correspondent Velina Vasileva on Friday.

Sliven hosts a national conference on energy and challenges of new technologies, organized by Chamber of Engineers in the Investment Design. The three-day forum opened on Friday. It also features discussions on electric vehicles and charging infrastructure, with a focus on improving charging stations.

The balancing of the electricity system requires solutions both in industry and in households, said Videv. "For now, technology offers mostly the use of lithium-ion batteries. They are used in container form at power plants, but are also spreading to households and small businesses," he explained.

He noted that Bulgaria is working in several aspects in the field of energy storage. One is the rehabilitation of the Chaira Pumped Storage Hydro Power Plant, which is the largest pumped storage plant in the Balkans, with several more projects yet to be implemented. They are considered the most efficient energy storage technologies.

At the same time, more and more investors are installing their own storage systems to avoid zero energy prices during the day and make a profit by selling the energy in

the evening.

He also said that the largest lithium-ion battery recycling plant in the Balkans is being built in Burgas.

Asked whether a collapse similar to the one in Spain could happen in Bulgaria, Videv was adamant that the danger is small thanks to the stable interconnections and synchronization with the European power grid.

Videv also drew attention to so-called "balcony plants" - small solar installations that are increasingly penetrating Western Europe. They can save up to 20% on household bills and are relatively affordable. However, supply in this country remains limited, mainly due to a lack of sufficient stock and priority buying from Western markets.

"In Bulgaria, these systems have yet to enter the market, but the potential is huge - every household can benefit from them," he said.

As for the future of energy, he stressed the need for an energy mix that includes both renewable and conventional energy sources. "Sooner or later coal will become a thing of the past - not only because it is polluting, but also because it is a finite resource. The future lies in the combination of solar, wind, hydro and small nuclear reactors," said Videv.

Bank of the Year for 2024 Goes to DSK Bank



Bank of the Year 2024 award ceremony, June 20, 2025 (BTA Photo/Minko Chernev)

Sofia - The grand prize for "Bank of the Year" for 2024 was awarded to DSK Bank. The award was presented by Prime Minister Rosen Zhelyazkov at a ceremony held here on Friday.

Since 2022, banks have been evaluated in the categories of

successful digital transformation and best operating digital project. This year, two banks were recognized in the successful digital transformation category: OBB and UniCredit Bulbank.

The winners of the best operating digital project award for 2024 are TBI Bank for the tbi bank app; Post Bank for AI & Automation CRM; and UBB for voice-initiated transfers via the AI-based digital assistant Kate. In the three main categories, Market Share, Efficiency, and Growth Dynamics, the winners were UBB, TBI Bank, and Post Bank.

The award for Foreign Bank Branch went to Citibank, Bulgaria Branch. The Mystery Shopper Award, which is highly valued by banks as a reflection of their daily efforts, went to First Investment Bank.

In his speech, Prime Minister Rosen Zhelyazkov said that the euro's introduction is a success for the Bulgarian people and many governments who have always set this topic as their political priority. In his words, the information campaign on the euro replacing the lev will reach every Bulgarian citizen, so that their fears would be eased.

The Deputy Governor of the Bulgarian National Bank and member of the BNB Management Board, Petar Chobanov, pointed out that many questions have arisen in the process of Bulgaria's accession to the eurozone, but they have answers. The BNB has published the main questions and answers on its website, both strategic and on how the European Central Bank's policy is implemented, he said.

Petya Dimitrova, Chair of the Management Board of the Association of Banks in Bulgaria and Chief Executive Officer and Chair of the Management Board of Post Bank, noted that banks in Bulgaria comply with all regulations and policies of the BNB and the European Central Bank, and that banks in Bulgaria are regulated twice as much as all others in the eurozone and the EU, she said. "Joining the eurozone was a long process for us, and we really wanted it to happen even earlier because we believe that this is the way for businesses, citizens, and institutions to unleash their potential. Banks have been ready for a long time to replace the lev with the euro," she noted.

The Bank of the Year awards are an indicator of the banks' achievements. The ranking is based on objective criteria that use official information from the banks' reports to the Bulgarian National Bank and audited bank reports. The main criteria underlying the ranking are market share, efficiency, and growth dynamics, the organizers said.

Bulgaria, Cyprus and Greece in Joint Labour Inspections



General Labour Inspectorate Executive Agency on inspection of construction site, Sofia, March 27, 2025 (Photo: Blagoy Kirilov)

Sofia - General Labour Inspectorate Sofia welcomed a delegation of labour inspectors from Cyprus and Greece for joint inspections in Bulgaria, the institution said Friday. The visit was the result of productive cooperation among the three countries in enforcing labour legislation, following an initiative launched in November 2024, when Bulgarian inspectors participated in a similar activity in Greece. The event was organized and supported by the European Labour Authority (ELA).

After introduction to the General Labour Inspectorate Executive Agency activity, the guests joined inspections of construction sites in Sofia. The inspections revealed that some of the sites did not meet the minimum requirements for healthy and safe working conditions and Bulgarian inspectors issued stop-work orders for construction and installation activities. The enforcement is applied when violations pose a direct threat to workers' lives and health and serves as a preventive measure against serious workplace accidents.

At some of the inspected sites, good practices were observed regarding the overall organization and implementation of policies ensuring healthy and safe working conditions.

No workers without employment contracts were found during the inspections, nor were there any illegally residing third-country nationals or individuals without proper work authorization.

After the inspections, the participants reviewed the results and exchanged knowledge and experience in labour inspection. Legal frameworks related to labour law compliance were also discussed. The guests from the Greek

and Cypriot Labour Inspectorates gave high praise for the professionalism and performance of their Bulgarian counterparts. They noted that they face similar challenges during inspections and emphasized that such exchanges offer valuable opportunities to share best practices for overcoming difficulties in inspection work.

Hourly Labour Costs Up 12.4% in Bulgaria Q1 of 2025



Illustrative Photo of BTL Industries's plant in Plovdiv, South Central Bulgaria, June 19, 2025 (BTA Photo/Boyan Botev)

Sofia - In the first quarter (Q1) of 2025, compared to Q1 of 2024, the total hourly labour cost in Bulgaria rose by 12.4%, according to preliminary data released by the National Statistical Institute on Friday.

The total hourly labour cost increased by 14.1% in industry and by 11.8% in services, the data show.

The largest annual increases in total labour costs were observed in construction (19.7%), real estate activities (19.2%), and arts, entertainment and recreation (17.9%). In the same period of the previous year, the highest growth rates were in other service activities (20.8%), accommodation and food service activities (20.6%), and construction (19.3%).

In the composition of total labour costs, wages and salaries per hour worked increased by 13.0% compared to the previous year, while other non-wage costs rose by 9.5%. In the first quarter of 2025, the growth rate of the wages and salaries component across economic sectors ranged from 20.3% in construction to 0.3% in mining and quarrying, relative to the first quarter of 2024.

In Q1 2024, the wage component increased by 15.8%, while the non-wage component grew by 15.9%. Wage growth across sectors varied, from 22.1% in Other Service Activities

to 10.9% in Electricity, Gas, Steam, and Air Conditioning Supply.

Varna Bar Association's Svetlozar Nikolov: No Decisions to End Legal Aid Protests



Svetlozar Nikolov, part of the leadership of the Varna Bar Association, at BTA's press club, Plovdiv, South Central Bulgaria, June 20, 2024 (BTA Photo/Tanya Blagova)

Plovdiv, South Central Bulgaria - Bar councils across Bulgaria have neither discussed nor decided to end the effective protests concerning legal aid, Svetlozar Nikolov, a member of the leadership of the Varna Bar Association, said at a press conference at the Bulgarian News Agency's press club in Plovdiv, South Central Bulgaria on Friday.

Nikolov spoke following an announcement by Minister of Justice Georgi Georgiev on Thursday that the protest of lawyers in Bulgaria is expected to end early next week.

Nikolov explained that in his view, some chairs of several bar councils had agreed to stop the protests, having been promised future changes to the Regulation on Legal Aid and potential increases in remuneration of up to 50%. He was adamant that none of the lawyers' demands had been met within these promises and there was no grounds for withdrawing from their position.

He stressed that bar councils should continue their protest, since it came after decades of neglect regarding the issue of legal aid. According to Nikolov, the remuneration for legal aid has not changed since 2002 and is insulting to the legal profession.

He added, "We embarked on this protest because we want a serious and responsible attitude from those in power so

that the situation can change. I see this withdrawal as a betrayal of the legal profession, entirely uncoordinated with bar councils and with the protesting lawyers. I express my absolute disagreement with ending the protest and call on all bar councils in the country to take a decision to continue the protest until our demands are met and we receive serious consideration," Nikolov said.

In his words, an agreement to end the protest was reached by the chairs of the Varna, Plovdiv, Stara Zagora and Sofia bar associations during a National Bar Conference, which is organized twice a year.

Nikolov added that lawyers' remuneration for legal aid is extremely low and furthermore, since February, lawyers from the National Legal Aid Bureau have not been paid. Another problem, Nikolov says, is that the bar councils have no information about the amounts to be paid to lawyers by the National Legal Aid Bureau or when these are disbursed.

Nikolov said that ending the protest is a behind-the-scenes arrangement that harms lawyers and should not be accepted by the bar councils and the lawyers themselves.

Minister of Justice Georgi Georgiev said Thursday that he has [reached an agreement](#) with bar council representatives to increase funding for legal aid by 50%, starting from October 1. Georgiev said the Justice Ministry and the Bar also agreed to set up a working group to develop a long-term legislative solution for legal aid. Since June, most bar associations have been protesting by refusing to participate in court-appointed cases involving special attorneys and representatives.

Project Provides Paid Internships, Permanent Jobs for 10,000 Young People

Sofia - The Employment Agency announced a project providing paid internships and permanent jobs for 10,000 young people. From June 24, the Agency will launch a new project "Youth Internships", aimed at young people aged 16 to 29, who are looking for opportunities to work in their free time.

The initiative is implemented with the financial support of the European Social Fund Plus through the Human Resources Development Programme 2021-2027 and aims to promote the labour integration of young people who are not engaged in work, education or training.

The project provides an opportunity to engage in practice in a real workplace. With the support of employers and mentors, participants acquire practical skills and create

work habits. Young people who are temporarily not studying or not working (during vacations) can also participate and receive remuneration for their work. Inactive or unemployed people can also take part in the project if they have not been in employment or education or training for at least four weeks before applying.

The apprenticeship is on a full-time or part-time contract for up to 6 months. Participants are paid the national minimum wage and a daily transport allowance depending on the location. Work is carried out under the supervision of a mentor appointed by the employer.

Applications are submitted to the employment offices. After registration, selection and referral to a specific employer takes place.

The project also provides incentives for employers.

Applications shall be submitted electronically through the Secure electronic delivery system, accompanied by declarations and documents certifying eligibility.

Bulgaria - MERCOSUR Trade Increased Significantly over Last 10 Years, Eurostat Data

Luxembourg - The European Union has exported EUR 55.2 billion worth of goods to the Southern Common Market's (MERCOSUR) full members Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, Eurostat data for 2024 published on Friday on the statistics agency's website shows.

Compared to 2023, EU exports to the four countries were down 1.3%.

Imports into the EU from the South American common market amounted to EUR 56 billion last year, or 4.2% more than in 2023.

Bulgaria exported goods to MERCOSUR member states for EUR 66.74 million in 2024, according to a reference in Eurostat's database.

At the same time, imports of goods from MERCOSUR to Bulgaria were worth EUR 544.35 million.

Over a period of ten years - from 2014 to 2024 - Bulgarian exports of goods to MERCOSUR jumped by 254.1%, while imports from Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay to Bulgaria - by 696.1%, according to BTA calculations.

Over the same period, EU exports to MERCOSUR rose by

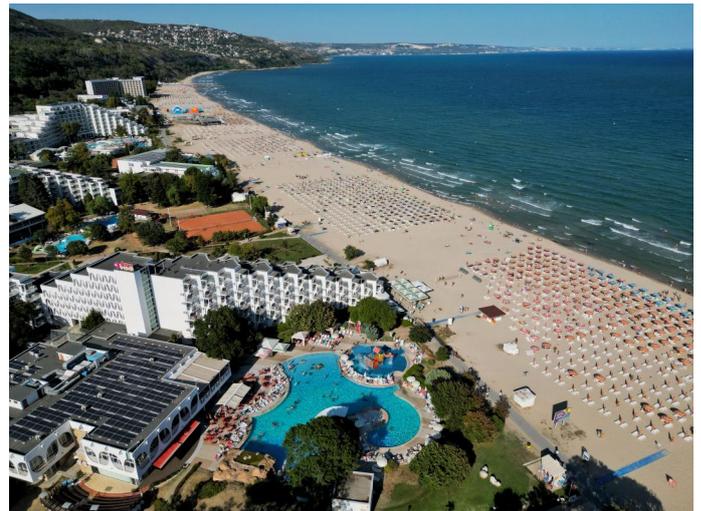
25.1% (EUR 11.1 billion) and imports by 50.3% (EUR 18.8 billion).

An agreement establishing the South American Common Market, MERCOSUR, was signed between the presidents of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay in 1991. The agreement entered into force on January 1, 1995.

After the EU had been negotiating a trade agreement with MERCOSUR for nearly two decades, in December 2024 the European Commission and MERCOSUR announced that they had concluded a free trade agreement.

European Council President Antonio Costa, during a visit to Brazil last month, said he expected the agreement to be formally ratified by December 2025.

Albena Sea Resort's Profits Rise in 2024



Albena Resort (BTA Photo/Vladimir Shokov)

Sofia - Albena AD reported a net profit of BGN 7.3 million for the financial year 2024. There is an almost four times increase compared to the previous year, according to the company's consolidated financial results published on Friday.

The results reported steady growth of activities in strategic consumer markets such as Germany, Romania, Poland, Czechia, Turkiye, and the Scandinavian region.

International festivals and the development of sustainable tourism also contributed to extending the season. Sport remained a key element of tourism, noted Albena AD.

At the beginning of the year, the company signed a cooperation agreement with the Junior World Tennis Series,

which reaffirms the resort's position on the international tennis scene. Equestrian sport is also making a steady return to the complex.

Bulgaria Ranks Second Among European Countries with "Excellent" Bathing Water, According to European Environment Agency Data for 2024



Sozopol, on the Black Sea, May 21, 2025 (BTA Photo/Stanimir Dimitrov)

Copenhagen - In 2024, 96% of bathing waters in the European Union met minimum quality standards, with 85% rated as "excellent" and only 1.5% as "poor", according to European Environment Agency (EEA) data published on Friday. Bathing water quality levels remain unchanged from 2023.

Cyprus ranks first in the ranking, with 99.2% of the country's waters rated as "excellent" quality, followed by Bulgaria - 97.9%, Greece - 97%, Austria - 95.8% and Croatia - 95.2%.

Albania is at the bottom of the ranking, with only 16% of the country's water classified as "excellent," which is a decline of more than 25 points on an annual basis.

Among more than 22,000 sites surveyed in 2024 in the EU, as well as in Albania and Switzerland, water quality was rated as "excellent," 'good', 'satisfactory' or 'poor' based on the levels of bacteria detected, indicating pollution mainly from sewage or farm animals.

In 2023, 321 sites had "poor" water quality, with 67 of them showing improvement in 2024, the EEA notes.

Access to Information Programme CEO Warns of Return of Practices Bulgarians Hoped to Leave Behind



Access to Information Programme (AIP) Executive Director Alexander Kashumov at Bulgarian News Agency's National Press Club in Sofia on June 20, 2025 (BTA Photo/Emiliya Vasileva)

Sofia - Practices from 35 years ago, which Bulgarians had hoped would not resume, are beginning to return, Access to Information Programme (AIP) Executive Director Alexander Kashumov said at the Bulgarian News Agency's National Press Club in Sofia on Friday. "The role of civil society organisations is being questioned, fascist marches in the streets and attempts to violate people's basic rights are resuming. NGOs, journalists, active citizens who are the bearers of rights for democracy are presented as enemies and spies. This hostile environment must be accounted for," he stressed.

Every year between 10,000 and 15,000 people apply for access to information, he said, presenting the 25th report on the state of access to information in Bulgaria, which includes data for 2024.

"We are worried about the Lobbying Bill becoming a law for foreign agents," Kashumov said.

On May 29, [Justice Minister Georgi Georgiev said](#) that the Government is aiming to present the Lobbying Bill by the end of June, as currently it is discussed with representatives of the civil sector and of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Commission. He explained that the idea behind the bill is to bring to light and regulate the way in which certain stakeholders impact decision-making in the legislative

process.

In February, a foreign agents registration bill was moved by the Vazrazhdane parliamentary group but [was defeated by the National Assembly on first reading](#). It proposed that all people in Bulgaria who have received or are receiving foreign funding should be registered. It envisioned that the Justice Ministry would keep a public electronic register of foreign agents, who would have 15 days to declare that they receive foreign funding after such funding reached BGN 1,000.

On Friday, Kashumov said that in the report there are recommendations regarding legislation related to access to public information. The experts believe that the Access to Public Information Act should be kept in line with the Constitution and international standards. Restrictions on the right of access are permissible only as an exception, to protect a competing right or legitimate interest from harm, if the public interest in access does not outweigh it, the AIP CEO stressed.

Information relating to draft legislation, the activities of working groups and opinions in the framework of drafting and discussion procedures, as well as formal and informal meetings and meetings involving public authorities and public officials, should be made publicly available to the maximum extent possible, the recommendations said.

The report reads that the concept of "investigative secrecy" should be interpreted and applied strictly. This protection should not be without time limit. Once the proceedings have been concluded, the main acts relating to them should be accessible, except in the parts containing protected information.

Acts of initiation, continuation, suspension, termination of pre-trial proceedings and prosecutorial investigations of high public interest, especially those related to persons in high public office or politicians, as well as information on the progress of such proceedings, should be accessible, the analysis argues.

Changes should be made to the Protection of Classified Information Act (PCIA), it reads.

The Council of Ministers and the State Commission on Information Security should initiate, support and monitor the process of declassification of documents in the executive branch, in accordance with the requirements of the PCIA and its Implementing Regulations, and ensure the publicity of lists of declassified documents, the analysts recommended.

Regarding judicial acts, the analysts recommended a change

in the Judicial System Act so that all judicial acts are subject to publication, together with the reasons, and the limitation of their publicity is limited to the deletion/deleting only of information that is subject to protection. In addition, the Judges College of the Supreme Judicial Council and the presidents of the Supreme Court of Cassation, the Courts of Appeal, the District Courts and the Regional Courts should take measures to publish the records of public hearings in criminal, civil and commercial cases on the courts' websites. Clear rules on the active disclosure of information in cases of high public interest are also needed, according to the report.

Shumen Region Warns of Feline Predator on the Loose



BTA Photo

Shumen, on the Danube - A warning message via the BG-Alert early warning system in connection with a feline predator has been sent in the Shumen region. "The procedure has been followed. This is done in implementation of a decision of the formed crisis headquarters. The text has been coordinated with the Regional Directorate for Fire Safety and Population Protection - Shumen," Milka Pavlova, chief expert for public relations at the Shumen Regional Administration, told BTA.

The message says that a large predator was spotted in the area of Shumen Plateau. Access is restricted. Avoid the area. If anyone spots the animal, they should call 112, the alert says.

As BTA reported, access to the pedestrian areas of the Shumen Plateau is temporarily restricted due to a report of a rare animal species. Checkpoints restrict traffic at several approaches to the Shumen Plateau. An employee from the zoo in Varna will anaesthetize the predator in the Shumen Plateau Nature Park, the most important thing is to preserve people's health, said Chief Inspector Trifon

Boychev.

On Thursday evening, shortly after 10 pm, a man who was walking in the nature park and spotted a large predator, went to the Shumen district headquarters. He presented a video in which he filmed the animal from afar. Immediately the competent institutions and colleagues from the General Directorate of National Police and Economic Police were notified, said Georgi Gendov, director of the Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Interior in Shumen.

A check in the records of the Shumen Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Water showed that there are no wild cats registered there, the Ministry of Environment and Water said on Friday. According to Article 21 of the Animal Protection Act, it is prohibited to import, acquire, sell, possess and keep specimens of the primate order and wild cats, except in zoos and rescue centres, experts at the ministry said.

800 Kg Tobacco without Excise Stamp Found In Police Action in Sofia

Sofia - In a specialized police action by Border Police Directorate General, officers found over 800 Kg of rolling tobacco and 11,000 packs of illegal food supplements, Interior Ministry press office reported on Friday. A suspect for the delivery was arrested.

The inspection was conducted in a storage unit, rented by a transportation company.

Last week, Interior Ministry's Sofia Directorate confiscated 150 Kg of illegal tobacco.

Bulgarian Military Demonstrate Interoperability Skills at CWIX 2025 Exercise in Poland

Bydgoszcz, Poland - Bulgarian military demonstrated their skills during NATO's Coalition Warrior Interoperability Exercise (CWIX) 2025. It was held at the Joint Force Training Centre in Bydgoszcz, Poland and an adjacent field-testing site between June 2 and 20, the Bulgarian Defence Ministry reported on Friday.

The exercise involved NATO member and partner countries. It was aimed at improving interoperability among NATO and national C4ISR systems (the acronym stands for

“command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance”).

Led by Headquarters Supreme Allied Command Transformation and directed by the Military Committee, CWIX is a key forum to test and upgrade C4I systems, particularly those intended for the NATO Response Force and the Combined Joint Task Force. It offers a protected, multi-domain environment to test C4ISR capabilities.

The main highlight during CWIX 2025 was the testing of C4I capabilities in the context of digital transformation, multi-domain operations and federated mission networking.

Bulgaria's Joint Forces Command, Mobile Communication and Information System, and Communication-Information Support and Cyber Defence Command committed personnel and communication-and-information equipment. The Bulgarian Land Forces committed personnel and a technical set-up of the Harris Command and Control (C2) system. The country's Air Force and Navy participated in the analytical group of the exercise, in which they validated Air, Maritime, TDL u Cyber tests.

Lieutenant-General Yavor Mateev, military representative of the Chief of Defence in Bulgaria's Permanent Delegation to NATO, was a guest on VIP Day, June 18. He and other officials watched interoperability demonstrations of command and management systems in multi-domain operations and federated mission networking.

121 Romanian Citizens Return from Armed Conflict Zone in Middle East



Romanian citizens return home from the armed conflict zone in the Middle East, Bucharest, June 21, 2025 (Romanian Government Photo)

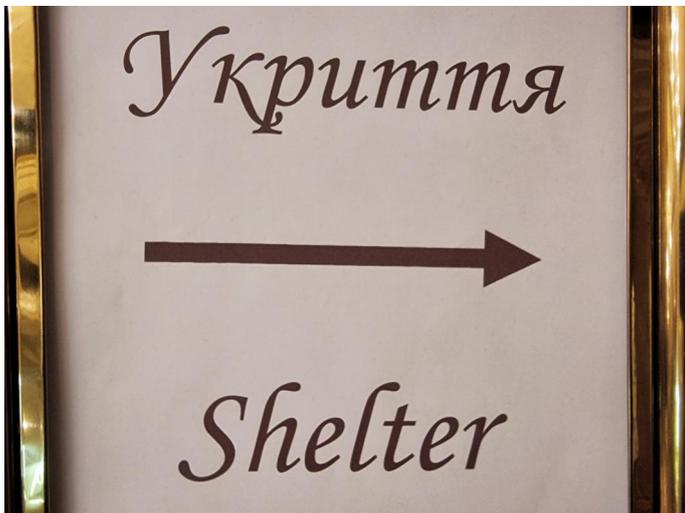
Bucharest - A total of 121 Romanian citizens returned to Romania Friday morning from the area of the armed conflict in the Middle East, following government-

coordinated efforts led by interim Prime Minister Catalin Predoiu, the Romanian Government said in a press release.

“121 individuals arrived in Bucharest this morning, and another 37 are en route to Romania and expected to arrive in the coming hours,” the statement reads. The evacuation was carried out by air, with military aircraft provided by the Romanian Ministry of National Defence and the Romanian Air Force.

The evacuation and repatriation were carried out entirely using Romania’s own financial resources.

Drone Attack Warning Issued in Odesa Province



A bomb shelter sign in Odesa, Ukraine (BTA Photo/Vladimir Shokov)

Odesa, Ukraine - A drone attack warning was issued in Odesa and the surrounding region, the head of the military administration of Odesa Province, Oleh Kiper, wrote on the Telegram social media on Friday afternoon.

Local Telegram channels reported 15 drones over the Black Sea, some of them flying towards the central and southern parts of the city of Odesa, the rest heading for Chornomorsk, Zatoka and Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy.

The provincial authorities advised people to hide in bomb shelters until an all-clear signal is sounded.

Odesa Province is home to the third largest community of expatriate Bulgarians, numbering more than 150,000 people, according to an official population census in Ukraine in 2001. Between 50,000 and 60,000 Bulgarians live in the regional capital, Odesa, while others are concentrated in the districts of Bolhrad, Izmail, and Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy.

Swedish Ambassador to North Macedonia: Constitutional Changes Are Key EU Step



Swedish Ambassador to North Macedonia Ami Larsson Jain, Skopje (BTA Photo/Marinela Velichkova)

Skopje - Sweden’s Ambassador to the Republic of North Macedonia, Ami Larsson Jain, said in an interview with the “360 Degrees” programme on MRT 1 on Friday that constitutional changes are clearly the next step in North Macedonia’s EU integration process.

She noted that, for now, the fate of the reforms rests with Skopje until the changes are adopted, after which further progress will depend on the European Union and its member states.

We are well aware of the concerns on the Macedonian side about what lies ahead. We say: help us to help you, because

we really want to, Larsson Jain said. Until the constitutional changes are adopted, the ball remains in Skopje's court. Once they are accepted, it will be up to us, the European Union, its member states and the institutions. After that, we must ensure that the formal start of negotiations takes place. Of course, if there is a mechanism for building trust, such a solution is welcome. But at this stage, the ball is in Skopje's court. What we want to see, of course, is progress. We strongly support enlargement and we support this country in its clearly stated goal – EU membership, Larsson Jain said in the interview.

In response to a question about concerns in North Macedonia regarding new demands from the Bulgarian side related to the work of the joint multidisciplinary committee on historical and educational issues, Larsson Jain explained that, while she is not familiar with the committee's work, it is important that both countries hold discussions "as good neighbours".

Part of good neighbourly relations is being able to sit down and talk in good faith. That is important for us. The conversation itself and meetings are a European value. History always has different versions and I can tell you that we in Scandinavia have had similar problems. It is not unusual to have different versions of history, but to sit down and talk is a European value, Larsson Jain said.

She added that there is "strong energy" for enlargement within the EU, stemming from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and that European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has given "clear guidance" to the commissioners to prepare EU institutions for enlargement.

Sometimes I get the feeling that Macedonians are left with the impression that constitutional changes are all that is needed for EU membership, but that is not the case, Larsson Jain added, reminding that fundamental issues in EU negotiations also include the rule of law, democracy, human rights and fighting corruption.

The reform agenda is the country's answer to the EU plan. That is an agenda formulated by the government. We are close to the moment when the country's progress can be measured. We know the start was good and the programme is ambitious. North Macedonia received recognition from Brussels and that is positive. Now we want to see the plan for reforms implemented quickly and energetically, Larsson Jain said.

Serbia's Raspberry Growers Threaten to Abandon Plantations Due to Low Purchase Prices



Illustrative photo of raspberries (BTA Photo/Irina Shopova)

Belgrade - At the beginning of the raspberry season, growers in Serbia are threatening to abandon their plantations due to low purchase prices of RSD 300-350 per kg (BGN 5-6), local media reported on Friday.

"This is a price that is really devastating when we look at what the yields have been this year and the weather conditions that have led to reduction in production. So as far as the price itself is concerned, it is very, very poor. We want prices of RSD 450 (BGN 6-7) so that we can cover the investment costs and leave some profit," producer Lazar Todorovic told public broadcaster RTS.

Raspberry growers warned that unless better conditions are provided, raspberry cultivation will face a significant reduction in acreage and producers. According to data from the Association of Raspberry Growers of Serbia, there are 14,000 hectares of planted areas, Forbes Srbija reported.

There are also certified organic raspberry growers in Serbia, but their purchase prices can reach RSD 500 (nearly BGN 9).

Serbia is the market leader in raspberries, along with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine, although in recent years the country has seen a downward trend in exports.

According to data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, raspberry exports peaked in 2021 at 99,861 tonnes, of which 1,900 tonnes were fresh production and the rest frozen. In 2021, revenues from this fruit were also the highest - EUR 431.88 million.

"Because of the bad weather conditions, we will be happy if this year the production of raspberries in Serbia reaches 30,000 tonnes," Association of Raspberry Growers of Serbia President Dobrivoje Radovic predicted to Zlatibor Radio

Luna in May.

Europe's Largest Barbecue Festival Opens in Bucharest



BTA/Ilko Valkov

Bucharest - Europe's largest barbecue festival opened on Friday in Bucharest. The culinary event continues until Monday and takes place at Romania's largest stadium, National Arena. The festival is not just about food, it's about music. Concerts by leading Romanian artists such as Smiley, Spike and Carla's Dreams are part of the programme.

Still, the event is above all about cuisine. More than 700 chefs from Romania and 10 other countries take part in the event. The festival is divided into themed zones for every meat lover: beef, pork, chicken, turkey, game, fish and seafood, as well as mix zones for burgers and sausages.

Visitors can watch and take part in live barbecue shows, professional and amateur competitions such as the "King of Hot", meat cutting demonstrations and even "eat as much as you can" challenges.

There will also be sampling of unique dishes from around the world, including specialties like crocodile meat burgers. There are also Bulgarian participants in the festival.

Summer School Holiday Starts for Around 20 Million Students in Turkiye



Bulgarian Sunday school at the Bulgarian Consulate General in Istanbul, Istanbul, May 20, 2025 (BTA Photo: Nahide Deniz)

Istanbul, Turkiye - The 2024-2025 school year officially ended on Friday for primary and secondary education institutions across Turkiye, marking the beginning of a three-month summer holiday for nearly 20 million students and over 1.2 million teachers within the Ministry of National Education system.

On June 22 the national university entrance exam for secondary school graduates will take place, with approximately 2.5 million candidates expected to sit the exam.

In the 2024-2025 school year the Turkish Ministry of Education introduced new curricula as part of the Century of Turkiye model aiming to strengthen vocational and technical education. Vocational high schools were opened as part of the Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools system.

For the upcoming school year, the Ministry plans to integrate artificial intelligence into the education system to support student learning and to hire 15,000 contract-based teachers.

The school year also concluded for students at the two Bulgarian Sunday schools in Turkiye. The school at the Bulgarian Consulate General in Istanbul was celebrating its 10th anniversary and handed out certificates to around 50 students, and the school at the Bulgarian Consulate General in Edirne also gave graduate certificates during a special ceremony.

Taracليا Welcomes Participants in Academic Cycling Tour



The branch of Angel Kanchev University of Ruse in Taracليا welcomes participants in an academic cycling tour (BTA Photo)

Taracليا - The branch of Angel Kanchev University of Ruse in Taracليا welcomed the participants in an academic cycling tour. In front of the building, the teachers from Ruse tasted traditional bread with salt, served by the students, while the pupils of the Children's Creative Centre performed a Bulgarian folk dance for the guests.

The cyclists were welcomed by Alexander Borimechkov, administrative director of the Ruse University branch in Taracليا.

Senior Assistant Professor Pavel Petrov expressed his gratitude for the warm welcome and presented Alexander Borimechkov with a plaque on behalf of the rector. For his part, the administrative director of the branch presented symbolic medals to all participants. Afterwards, everyone involved in the event planted a tree in the garden in front of the university as a memento.

Senior Assistant Professor Pavel Petrov from the University of Ruse told BTA that he was the initiator of this idea. "There are eight of us in total – the group includes a professor, an associate professor, and the rest of us are senior assistants. We are coming to Taracليا from Silistra. Our route was as follows: we left Ruse, passed through Razgrad – the first branch, then through Silistra, where we spent the night. This morning we set off for Taracليا. Tomorrow we will enter Romania again – we will spend the night in Giurgiu, then in Turnu Măgurele, and then we will reach the last branch – Vidin. On June 24, we will return to Ruse. As soon as we entered this area, I felt like I was in Bulgaria," Petrov said.

After the official welcome, the guests from Ruse took a tour of Taracليا, the center of the Bessarabian Bulgarians, and got to know its destinations and landmarks.

The cycling tour of the branches of the University of Ruse is

part of the celebrations marking the 80th anniversary of the university's founding, 70 years of academic sports, and 65 years of academic tourism. It is held under the patronage of the rector of the University of Ruse, Assoc. Prof. Desislava Atanasova, and the honorary rector and chairman of the General Assembly of the university, Acad. Hristo Beloev. The cycling tour is called "academic" because it covers all branches of the University of Ruse.

Valentina Georgieva Wins Vault Gold Medal at Artistic Gymnastics World Challenge Cup in Tashkent, Uzbekistan



Bulgarian gymnast Valentina Georgieva (BTA Photo/Krasimir Krastev)

Tashkent - European silver medallist on the vault Valentina Georgieva won the title at the 2025 FIG Artistic Gymnastics World Challenge Cup in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The Bulgarian gymnast got an average score of 13.450 points for her two attempts and came ahead of legend Oksana Chusovitina.

The hosts' representative, Chusovitina, who has competed in a record eight Olympics and celebrated her 50th birthday a day earlier, was second with a score of 13.075 points. The bronze medal went to another Uzbekistani representative, Shakhinabonu Yusufova, with 12.750 points.

Viktoria Ventsislavova, the second Bulgarian in this final, finished seventh with a score of 12.200 points.

The competition, which closes on June 21, is organized by the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG).

Sofia to Host European Football Leagues General Assembly



Source: Bulgarian Professional Football League

Sofia - The Association of European Professional Football Leagues, more commonly known as the European Leagues, will hold its General Assembly in Sofia in the spring of 2026. Representatives of 40 professional football leagues in 34 countries, including England's Premier League, Spain's LaLiga, Germany's Bundesliga, France's Ligue 1 and Italy's Serie A, will gather for the event, which will be hosted by the Bulgarian Professional Football League (BPFL).

The European Leagues General Assembly is the world's third most important forum in association football after the FIFA and UEFA congresses.

The European Leagues represents the highest divisions in the football league systems of Albania, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Scotland, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Ukraine. Other members are lower divisions such as the English Football League, Italy's Serie B and C, and the Netherlands' Eerste Divisie. The organization also has associated members: the Turkish Union of Clubs, 3. Liga (Germany) and the League of Ireland, while the Football Association of Wales has development member status.

The 50th European Leagues General Assembly was held in Frankfurt, Germany in 2025, when it was hosted by the Bundesliga. A year earlier, the Assembly was held in London, England, hosted by the Premier League.

BPFL President Atanas Karaivanov commented: "I want to express my sincere thanks to European Leagues President Claudius Schaefer, Vice President Mathieu Moreuil and the

whole Board of Directors for trusting us to host an event of such scale. This is an exceptional honour for the BPFL and Bulgarian football in general. Sofia will welcome representatives of the leading professional football leagues, an event of unprecedented significance for our country. We are convinced we will live up to the task."

London Event Marks 60th Anniversary of BTA's LIK Magazine, 90th Anniversary of Bulgarian National Radio



The London event marking the 60th anniversary of the first issue of LIK magazine, the Bulgarian News Agency's (BTA) publication dedicated to literature, art, and culture; and the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR), June 19, 2025 (BTA Photo/Iva Vatashka)

London - A thematic bilingual event - held in both Bulgarian and English at the Bulgarian Embassy in London on Thursday evening and organized by the Bulgarian Cultural Institute (BCI) in London marked two anniversaries: the 60th anniversary of the first issue of LIK magazine, the Bulgarian News Agency's (BTA) publication dedicated to literature, art, and culture; and the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR).

The event featured presentations of the special anniversary editions LIK at 60 and BNR: 90 Years Later, dedicated to the two media milestones. Two exhibitions were also on display, part of the BNR's commemorative events: the documentary exhibition "90 Years of BNR - The Radio of Generations of Bulgarians", and selected works from the national competition "In the Footsteps of Sirak Skitnik."

The event included remarks by Kiril Valchev, Director General of BTA; Milen Mitev, Director General of BNR;

Yanitsa Hristova, Managing Editor of LIK magazine; Plamen Dichkov, BNR's Commercial Director; and Alexander Doichinov, Director of the National High School of Arts Dimitar Dobrovich in Sliven.

The evening was hosted by Miglena Rogacheva and Yoana Peeva, who also provided English interpretation for the speakers.

[BTA Director General Kiril Valchev](#) said in his remarks that the translation of LIK magazine into foreign languages is an opportunity for Bulgaria to freely display the face of its culture.

Valchev said that some issues of LIK are already being published in foreign languages. The issue about Bulgarians in Ukraine was published in English. LIK issues in English also covered the 45th anniversary of the spaceflight of Bulgaria's first cosmonaut, Georgi Ivanov, which made Bulgaria the sixth nation to send a person into space, as well as the historic first voyage to and from Antarctica by the Bulgarian naval research vessel Sv. Sv. Kiril I Metodii and Bulgarian science on the continent. That Antarctic-themed issue was also published in Spanish. Additional English-language issues featured the 155th anniversary of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS), and the 60th anniversary of the LIK magazine itself. The issue on Bulgaria and World Expositions, presented on Bulgaria Day at EXPO 2025 in Osaka, Japan, was published in both English and Japanese. An upcoming July issue dedicated to Bulgaria and UNESCO will be available in English and French, Valchev added.

BTA's Director General also presented the history of LIK, whose first issue was published on January 8, 1965.

In a video address, [LIK Editor-in-Chief Georgi Lozanov](#) said that as many Bulgarians live and make a career in the West, he sees events like this one as small unifications between territorial Bulgaria and Bulgaria without borders. "Such a unification can only happen in an open world, and not when everyone is staring at their own - national - navel. In this sense, the Bulgarian News Agency has become, to a large extent, an institution of cultural diplomacy, and LIK plays a role in this mission," he said.

[LIK Managing Editor Yanitsa Hristova](#) told the audience that LIK's visit to London is the magazine's first public appearance since it was awarded the Golden Quill for its contribution to Bulgarian culture on the eve of May 24, 2025. Hristova emphasized that the work and efforts of the authors, translators, and editors who have tied their professional paths to LIK have not gone unnoticed. "Over the years, recognition has come not only from readers but also from various organizations," she said.

[Bulgarian National Radio \(BNR\) Director General Milen Mitev](#) said the 90th anniversary of BNR is a time to reflect on the rich history of this institution. "To remember the successes and challenges, to remember the people who built and continue to build the Radio, thanks to whom we stand here today. We are doing this together with our friends from the Bulgarian News Agency (BTA), who, for 90 years now, since the very beginning, have been our partners," he said in London on Thursday.

[Bulgarian Ambassador to London Tihomir Stoychev](#) said in his remarks at the event that his generation grew up with the two magazines published at the time by BTA – LIK and Paraleli, "and indeed, LIK was a window to European and world literature and culture". Ambassador Stoychev extended congratulations to BTA's Director General Kiril Valchev for his initiative to revive LIK with a new strategy and vision, not only to preserve cultural memory, but also to promote contemporary Bulgarian literature. Stoychev said that both BTA and BNR are institutions in their own right, symbolizing the lasting importance of Bulgarian media and cultural heritage.

Alexander Doichinov, Director of the National High School of Arts in Sliven, presented the second exhibition, featuring works from a national competition "In the Footsteps of Sirak Skitnik." As the exhibition's curator, he noted that by following in Sirak Skitnik's footsteps, the young artists who participated in the competition immersed themselves in the artistic world of Bulgaria during the first half of the 20th century - "a world rich with ideas and events, with creators and artworks comparable to the global standards of that era."

Plamen Dichkov, Commercial Director of the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR), introduced the documentary exhibition "90 Years of BNR – The Radio of Generations of Bulgarians" to the London audience. In his words, it is "not just an anniversary exhibition." "This is the story of an institution that for nine decades has not only been a witness but also an active participant in Bulgaria's history," he said. "The concept of the exhibition is unique. Instead of telling our own story, we invited two of the most respected institutions of memory—the State Archives Agency and the Bulgarian News Agency—to open their archives and create this visual narrative. The result is an honest, objective, and multi-layered portrayal of nine decades of Bulgarian radio," Dichkov added.

During the event, [pianist Mario Angelov performed music](#) by renowned Bulgarian composers Pantcho Wladigeroff, Dimitar Nenov, and Krasimir Kyurkchiiski.

Finally, the guests were treated to Bulgarian wine.

Bulgarian National Radio's 90th Anniversary Invites Reflection on Its Rich History, Says Director General Milen Mitev



Bulgarian National Radio Director General Milen Mitev at the Bulgarian Cultural Institut London, June 19, 2025 (BTA Photo/Iva Vatashka)

London - Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) Director General Milen Mitev said the 90th anniversary of BNR is a time to reflect on the rich history of this institution. “To remember the successes and challenges, to remember the people who built and continue to build the Radio, thanks to whom we stand here today. We are doing this together with our friends from the Bulgarian News Agency (BTA), who, for 90 years now, since the very beginning, have been our partners,” he said in London on Thursday.

Mitev was speaking at an event organized by the Bulgarian Cultural Institute (BCI) London and its director Svetla Dionisieva, along with collaborators Miglena Rogacheva, Diyana Spasova and Yoana Peeva. The initiative celebrated two media anniversaries: the 60th anniversary of the first issue of BTA's *LIK* magazine for literature, art and culture, and the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Bulgarian National Radio.

To mark these two milestones, thematic issues of the *LIK* magazine were published earlier in 2025 and presented to the audience at BCI by BTA Director General Kiril Valchev.

Two exhibitions, part of the BNR anniversary celebrations, were also showcased at BCI in London: a documentary exhibition “90 Years of BNR: The Radio of Generations of Bulgarians,” and a display of artworks from a national contest titled “In the Footsteps of Sirak Skitnik.”

Sirak Skitnik (the artistic pseudonym of Panayot Todorov) was the first Director of Radio Sofia, appointed on June 8, 1935.

Regarding the documentary exhibition, Mitev noted that it was created with the support of the State Archives Agency and BTA.

“Both institutions opened their archives to search for and provide us with documents and photographic materials related to BNR's history,” he said.

“The efforts of our partners at the State Archives extended not only through the Central State Archive but also across all regional archives. The exhibition we are presenting is a visual representation of the documentary collections we received from the Archives and BTA. It is an external view of the Radio, as seen in documents, facsimiles, photo archives and periodicals. This is a history built on facts, just as the unshakable principles of journalism require the Radio to present verified and reliable facts,” Mitev added.

“In 2023, to commemorate 140 years since the birth and 80 years since the death of Sirak Skitnik, BNR, together with the Dimitar Dobrovich National High School of Fine Arts in Sliven (Southeastern Bulgaria), launched the art competition 'In the Footsteps of Sirak Skitnik',” the BNR Director General said.

In October 2023, the *LIK* magazine dedicated an issue to Sirak Skitnik. On October 22, the 140th anniversary of his birth, the issue was presented at the BTA National Press Club in his hometown of Sliven.

Ancient Bulgarian Artifact Handed Over for Repatriation at Ceremony in Madrid

Sofia - A ceremony for the handover of an ancient marble votive plaque took place on Wednesday at the Embassy of Bulgaria in Madrid, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on Friday. The artifact, which depicts a Thracian horseman, is part of Bulgaria's cultural heritage. It was handed over to the Bulgarian Ambassador to Spain, Aleksey Andreev, by the Spanish police authorities.

According to the Bulgarian diplomatic mission in Madrid, the ancient artifact dates back to the 2nd century AD and was illegally removed from the Regional Historical Museum in Razgrad in 1996.

The recovery of the long-missing item is the result of effective cooperation between the Bulgarian and Spanish police authorities. Attending the ceremony on the Spanish side were Chief Commissioner Jose Angel Gonzalez, Commissioner Agustin Juan Vazquez of the Central Unit for Specialized Crime and Violence, and Inspector Montserrat

de Pedro Esteban, Chief of the Historical Heritage Brigade.

Ambassador Andreev expressed his gratitude to the representatives of the specialized Spanish police units and highlighted the importance of close operational cooperation both bilaterally and within the framework of European structures.

Gonzalez and Esteban expressed their satisfaction that the valuable artifact will return to its rightful place, the Regional Historical Museum in Razgrad.

Chirpan Hosts International Lavender Festival 2025



BTA Photo/Emil Dimov

Chirpan, Southern Bulgaria - The fourth International Lavender Festival, held under the auspices of the Tourism Ministry, will once again transform Chirpan into a vibrant stage for beauty, art, and tradition. Over the next three days, the town and the picturesque villages of Sredno Gradishte and Spasovo will be immersed in the scent of lavender, blending the magic of nature with the richness of Bulgarian culture and international exchange under the motto “A Celebration of the Senses,” tourism expert Tanya Georgieva from the local administration said.

Friday’s program opens with a Lavender Market showcasing crafts, farm products, and arts, along with photography exhibitions by the “Dimitar Danailov – 2013” Community Center and “Living Colors” by Doncho Donchev.

Vice President Iliana Iotova will attend the official opening events. The festivities will begin with a ritual lavender harvest near Chirpan, followed by a festive procession. The official opening ceremony will take place at the Saedinenie Square in Chirpan, followed by a glamorous concert of film

music performed by the State Opera – Stara Zagora and featuring Michaela Fileva in the special production “Cine-Classic Soundtracks.”

The concert will feature music from world cinema classics, performed by the State Opera–Stara Zagora orchestra under the baton of conductor Viktor Krumov, with captivating multimedia and hosted by Arina Karaivanova. For the first time, the lyrical theme from “Schindler’s List: will be performed by the orchestra’s concertmaster Anna Ivanova. Michaela Fileva will also present renditions of Bulgarian film music.

Saturday’s program begins with paneurhythmy, lavender field yoga, and 360-degree video memories. Throughout the day, visitors can enjoy art installations in the Trendafilov lavender field, exhibitions, artisan and farmer’s markets, lavender-themed culinary delights, and demonstrations of traditional customs. The program also includes ethnographic presentations, international folklore, and cultural exhibitions featuring Bulgaria, Armenia, Italy, Azerbaijan, and India.

Modern music fans can look forward to performances by Papi Hans and Plamen Bonev, as well as an open-air night party with DJ Yassen Petrov from Metropolis.

Organized by the Municipality of Chirpan, the festival will conclude with a “Bollywood” experience – featuring Indian dance lessons and henna painting. The festival will close with a signature folklore performance by the iconic Filip Kutev Ensemble.

Francofolies de Bulgarie 2025 Festival Kicks Off in Plovdiv

Plovdiv, South Central Bulgaria - The Francofolies de Bulgarie 2025 International Festival began here on Friday, the Bulgarian Tourism Ministry said in a press release.

Hosted by Plovdiv’s Canoe and Rowing Centre, the June 20–22 event is part of the Francofolies international chain and is taking place in seven countries. The established international format pools culture, education and tourism.

ZAZ, IN-GRID, GipsyKings, Master KG, Alexandra Stan and Lili Ivanova are among the global and Bulgarian performers on the Festival’s varied music programme. On the sidelines, there are gourmet zones, an arts and crafts bazaar, and activities for children. The Francofolie Youth Module brings together 100 pupils aged 16 to 19 from the French-language secondary schools countrywide. The module gives young people a venue to share ideas, knowledge and

energy in French-language debates on subjects concerning universal human and common European values.

"Such events are key to the growth of festival and cultural tourism in Bulgaria," said Tourism Minister Miroslav Borshosh. "They diversify the cultural calendar, attract new audiences, and contribute to the country's positive image as a modern and hospitable destination. The Ministry of Tourism will continue to support initiatives combining creative, culture, and international presence," Borshosh said, quoted in his Ministry's press release.

"Soul of the Bulgarians": Pittsburgh-Based Bulgarian Dance Ensemble Celebrates 70 Years with Tour in Bulgaria



The Pittsburgh-based ensemble for traditional Bulgarian dances performing in Sofia, June 19, 2025 (BTA Photo/Valeria Skorich)

Sofia - The Otets Paisii ensemble for traditional Bulgarian dances performed a vibrant concert at Sofia's Iskar Culture House on June 19, 2025. The ensemble is part of the Bulgarian-Macedonian National Educational and Cultural Center (BMNECC) based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Their Thursday evening event marked the second stop on a tour of Bulgaria, celebrating the ensemble's 70th anniversary.

Speaking to BTA, Nikolay Nedev, Vice President of BMNECC, highlighted the ensemble's multicultural makeup: about 60% of the dancers are not ethnic Bulgarians.

Nedev expressed pride in promoting Bulgarian culture through the ensemble's work. "I live in Pittsburgh and, as a member and vice president of BMNECC, I feel proud to represent Bulgarian culture and folklore arts," Nedev said. "Our members have roots in Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia,

Croatia, Bosnia, Ukraine, the U.S., and other countries," he said. "This tour is especially meaningful because it shows foreigners the warm reception of Bulgarian audiences and gives them a chance to experience our beautiful country."

Under the evocative title "Soul of the Bulgarians," the Thursday concert showcased traditional songs and dances from Bulgaria's Pirin region. The performance featured not only the Otets Paisii ensemble but also the folk groups Slavey and Zornitsa. The evening concluded with a powerful joint performance of the patriotic song "De e Bulgaria" [Where is Bulgaria?].

Founded in 1955, Otets Paisii has grown into a diverse cultural institution and was one of the founders of the Pittsburgh International Festival. The ensemble includes over 50 members, with 23% born in Bulgaria and 46% having direct Bulgarian heritage.

Their ongoing tour kicked off on June 16 and will run through June 22, featuring multiple concerts and educational activities. On June 17, they performed in Blagoevgrad, collaborating with local groups Pirinche, Vihren, and Pirinska Kitka. The final concert will take place at the Summer Theater in Nessebar on June 21, alongside the local art school. Bulgarian President Rumen Radev will attend the event and present the ensemble with the Presidential Honorary Badge in recognition of their significant contribution to preserving and promoting Bulgarian folk art, fostering cultural exchange, and enhancing Bulgaria's cultural presence worldwide.

The musical event at Iskar Culture House was supported by Balkanfolk, reflecting a strong collaboration within the Bulgarian cultural community.

Georgi Ashikov-Asho Displays Graphic Art Works in Serdica Gallery

Sofia - "The Woman as a Beginning" is the title of a new exhibition by Georgi Ashikov-Asho, which will be showcased at the Serdica Gallery in Sofia. The exhibition opens on July 1 and will run until July 19, the organizers announced.

"Since the dawn of human civilization, the woman has symbolized life, inspiration, and transformation. She is not merely a biological mother—she is a bearer of culture, of morals, of memory, and of progress. Behind every great historical event, discovery, or renaissance, there is often a strong woman—with vision, courage, and spirit. A woman

not only gives life, but gives it meaning - ushering in not just a new generation, but new ideas, aspirations, and forms of art," the gallery stated.

According to the organizers, this concept is clearly expressed in Georgi Ashikov's work -the woman as a source of inspiration. "The woman as the spark that shifts the flow of time and transforms the worldview of man. In his compositions—drawn from everyday life and simple daily scenes—the woman is not just present; she transforms. Her appearance, even in shadow or a casual gesture, elevates the mundane, turning it into something deeper, more beautiful, and oriented toward inner growth," they noted.

"In the world of Georgi Ashikov, the woman is the beginning of everything," the organizers emphasized.

Georgi Ashikov-Asho was born on June 23, 1978, in Sandanski, Bulgaria. He graduated from the South-West University "Neofit Rilski" with a degree in sculpture under Professor Dimitar Sotirov. Since 2018, he has been a member of the Union of Bulgarian Artists. He has participated in numerous group exhibitions as well as regional and international art residencies and plein air events.

The Weather on June 21-22



BTA Photo/Boyan Botev

Sofia - June 21

Mostly sunny. Increased cloudiness before noon over Central Northern Bulgaria and in the region of Sredna Gora, with isolated rain showers. In the afternoon, cumulus and cumulonimbus clouds will develop mainly over southwestern Bulgaria, with brief rain showers and thunderstorms in some areas. Light to moderate northeasterly wind. Highs: 23C to 28C, around 24C in Sofia.

Black Sea coast: Mostly sunny. More clouds before noon

over the southern coast, and slight cumulus cloud development in the afternoon. Light to moderate northeasterly wind. Highs: 23C to 26C. Sea water temperature: 21C to 24C. Sea wave height: 2 degrees Douglas, 3 south of Burgas.

The mountains: Increased cloudiness before noon along the Balkan ridge, Sredna Gora, the Rhodopes, Strandzha, and Sakar. Around and after noon, cumulus and cumulonimbus clouds will develop, with brief showers and thunderstorms mainly in the Rila-Rhodope area and Sredna Gora. Moderate northeasterly wind, northwesterly along the ridges. Highs: around 17C at 1,200 metres, around 9C at 2,000 metres.

June 22

Sunny. Temporary cloud increase in the afternoon over eastern and mountain regions, without precipitation. Light wind, still from the north on Sunday. Temperatures will rise.

Source: National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology

June 20, 1954: Inauguration of First Danube Bridge Between Bulgaria and Romania



Inauguration of Danube Bridge, June 20, 1954 (BTA Archive photo)

Ruse, Northeast Bulgaria - On June 20, 1954, the first bridge on the Danube River between Bulgaria and Romania was inaugurated, consolidating the cooperation between the two countries. Built between Bulgarian town Ruse and Romanian Giurgiu, the Danube Bridge provided both a railway and motorway connection between the countries.

At the time, it was the largest combined bridge (with a

railway and motorway) in Europe. Until 2013, this was the first and only overland crossing in the entire 472-km Bulgarian–Romanian stretch of the river.

Called "The Bridge of Friendship" [Most na Druzhbata] in socialist Bulgaria, it was built in 2.5 years by Bulgaria and Romania in cooperation with the Soviet Union.

The bridge is 2.8 km long and passes at a height of 30 meters above the river. The central part of the bridge is mobile and can be lifted for oversized boats passage.

Historic Significance

In 1948, Bulgaria and Romania signed an "agreement on friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance" which gave birth to the idea of Danube Bridge.

In 1951, after a long time of consideration, Ruse and Giurgiu were chosen as the location. The project was named "Object 889", and plans were drafted in complete secrecy by Soviet engineers. Specialists of other "fraternal socialist countries" – Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary also took part in the process.

Construction

Construction commenced in 1952 and was finished in 1954. A total of 19,200 tons of steel were used to build 160-metre bridge structures on shore which were later transported to the water on floating platforms. The project required the work of 7,000 Romanian and 4,700 Bulgarian workers.

The inauguration day in 1954 brought together Bulgarian prime minister Valko Chervenkov (1950-1956), his Romanian counterpart Gheorghe Georgiou-Dej (1952-1955) and project leader Leonid Saprykin together to give speeches.

Design

The bridge was designed by Bulgarian architect Georgi Ovcharov who is the architect behind famous buildings in Sofia, like Sofia University's Faculty of Biology, the Ministry of Interior and the Stefan Makedonski National Music Theatre.

The eagle heads along its length were the idea of Ukrainian sculptor Mykhailo Parashchuk.

Here's how BTA's Home News Desk Bulletin covered the news on June 20, 1954:

Our Motherland is celebrating a new major victory on the path of socialism, on the path of friendship with the great Soviet Union and the people's democracies. The newly built bridge

over the Danube between Ruse and Giurgiu – the largest bridge in Europe, was inaugurated today. This spectacular socialist building project, which was completed seven months ahead of schedule, is a new and precious offspring of the fraternal friendship between the Bulgarian and Romanian peoples and of the enormous assistance of the Soviet Union. It provides further brilliant proof of the correct policy of the BCP, of the triumph of socialism in our country.

June 20, 1962: First Bulgarian Mountain Lift Opens Festively in Vitosha



The lift's base station at Sofia's borough of Knyazhevo, June 20, 1962 (BTA Archive Photo/Vladimir Ivanov)

Sofia - On June 20, 1962, the first mountain lift in Bulgaria was inaugurated between Sofia's Knyazhevo borough and Kopitoto - a locality in the Vitosha Mountain. Thanks to the cable car, tourists to the Vitosha Nature Park could, in just 10 minutes, easily and comfortably climb up to Kopitoto.

The cabin lift was manufactured and delivered by the Austrian company Girak Brothers. The total length was 1,900 meters. The capacity of the gondola was 600 people per hour from the base station in Knyazhevo at 744 meters above sea level, to the final one – on top of Kopitoto at 1,348 m. In 1986, a 160-meter-high TV tower was built next to the cable car's end station. There were 54 cabins, which seated four people, with ski carrying facilities. The ropeway speed was 3 metres per second, and the time of travel was 11 minutes.

The lift is not operational.

It stopped working in 1993, because it was unsafe - this happened before Vajeni Linii EAD was acquired by Vitosha Ski AD. The concessionaire of the mountain slopes and the facilities on the mountain said that in the period from 1993

to 2007, the Knyazhevo – Kopitoto lift was plundered, which made it impossible to rebuild. Moreover, it was built using very old technology that is not applicable to modern technical requirements, they added.

In June 2025, Sofia Mayor Vassil Terziev published a roadmap for the restoration of the Vitosha lifts. He explained what the plans and the possible obstacles are. The main steps include preparing a project and securing financing, analyzing the legislative framework and making necessary changes, updating the Vitosha Management Plan, adopting development plans and implementing the investment. The Mayor pointed out that the restoration of the Simeonovo, Dragalevtsi and Knyazhevo lifts depend not only on the Municipality, but also on the goodwill of the owners and a number of institutions.

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