

Bulgaria



With a public debt ratio at less than a quarter of the European Union (EU) average and a government budget deficit under the ceiling set by the Treaty of Maastricht, two decades of austerity has made Bulgaria a bastion of fiscal probity relative to its more prosperous EU partners. Yet such are the abuses of the politicians responsible for steering so enviable a course that just 15 per cent of voters consider the country's political class as trustworthy.

Small wonder, then, that even as Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski's Bulgarska Socialističeska Partija (BSP) (Bulgarian Socialist Party)-led coalition government attempted to lift the level of public borrowing to combat the country's double-digit unemployment rate, it was met with a presidential veto and calls for its resignation. Indeed, protests that began occurring on a daily basis in May 2013, following the early elections that brought Oresharski to power, turned unruly by July.

That was when coalition deputies passed amendments to the 2013 government budget that featured a Lev1 billion

(US\$675 billion) increase in public borrowing. Protesters forced a stand-off that was broken only after riot police intervened. Entering the fourth quarter, picketing – much of it organised via social media – at parliament and cabinet buildings on Dondukov Boulevard in central Sofia had become a facet of daily life in the capital.

Shouted out

Ironically, protests – reported as the largest in 16 years – had paved the Oresharski government's path to power. Former Prime Minister Boiko Borisov submitted his resignation in February amid public demonstrations over energy prices and after the purge of his finance minister, Simeon Djankov, who prepared the 2013 spending plan.

A wire-tapping scandal that followed in April, that in part involved Djankov, failed to dampen his centre-right Grazhdani za Evropeysko Razvitiie na Bulgariya (GERB) (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria) party's popularity. At least, not entirely. It was still the leading vote-getter in the 12 May 2013

KEY FACTS

Official name: Republika Bulgaria (Republic of Bulgaria)

Head of State: President Rosen Plavneliev (Gerb) (from 22 Jan 2012)

Head of government: Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski (BSP) (from 29 May 2013)

Ruling party: Coalition of Bulgarska Socialističeska Partija (BSP) (Bulgarian Socialist Party) and Attack (from 5 Jul 2013)

Area: 110,994 square km

Population: 7.25 million (2012)

Capital: Sofia

Official language: Bulgarian

Currency: Lev (Lev) = 100 stotinki

Exchange rate: Lev1.48 per US\$ (Jul 2013)

GDP per capita: US\$7,033 (2012)*

GDP real growth: 0.78% (2012)*

GDP: US\$51.02 billion (2012)*

Labour force: 3.37 million (2012)*

Unemployment: 12.38% (2012)*; 14% mid-2013

Inflation: 2.40% (2012)*

Balance of trade: -US\$4.67 billion (2012)*

Annual FDI: US\$1.80 billion (2011)

* estimated figure

poll, albeit with 20 fewer seats than the 117 it won in 2009.

However, with only 97 seats Borisov was unable to muster a majority in the 240-seat National Assembly. President Rosen Plevneliev, himself a target of the wire taps, opted to let Oresharski's Bulgarska Socialistiiska Partija (BSP) (Bulgarian Socialist Party) form a coalition government backed by the Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi (DPS) (Movement for Rights and Freedoms), the party of ethnic Turks.

Despite more than doubling its parliamentary representation, to 84 seats, the BSP/DSP tie-up fell one vote shy of a majority and the coalition is reliant on the ultra-nationalist Ataka (Attack) party, which controls 23 seats in the chamber. Together, this group overturned only the second presidential veto issued since 1990, with Oresharski accusing Plevneliev, a former development minister in the Borisov government elected in 2012, of 'a series of unbalanced and biased actions.'

Declining growth

The backdrop to the civic unrest, which has erupted routinely in Varna, Burgas and other Bulgarian cities as unemployment has risen from 6 per cent in 2007 to 14 per cent at mid-year 2013, is the slow-growing Bulgarian economy. In the wake of the global financial crisis and in the enduring euro-zone sovereign

debt crisis that it precipitated, gross domestic product (GDP) has increased only at an average annual rate of 1 per cent since a 5.5 per cent contraction in 2009, according to Eurostat, the EU statistical bureau.

This compares with pre-crisis jumps that averaged above 6 per cent in the run-up and through Bulgaria's 2007 EU accession. With industrial production slipping year-on-year to -4.4 per cent in July 2013, growth for the year appeared likely to reach only half of the 1.8 per cent rate of GDP growth on which the Borisov government's 2013 budget was based.

Under Djankov, the GERB government had squeezed the budget deficit from 2 per cent in 2011 to 0.5 per cent of GDP in 2012. At around 18 per cent of GDP, Bulgaria's ratio of public debt is well below the 90 per cent of GDP average across the EU. However, the cuts in wages and pensions employed to achieve those results have left around a quarter of the country's 7.3 million people living below the poverty level. When Djankov refused at the turn of the year to pay out lev1 billion (US\$1.3 billion) in agricultural subsidies ahead of a scheduled transfer from the EU, it helped to precipitate the February outcry that forced Borisov's resignation.

An end to austerity?

At 1.35 per cent of GDP in 2012, the government budget deficit stands well below the Maastricht threshold for participants

in the Group of 28's economic and monetary union. However, abetted by a relentless commitment to a hard-money approach by the Bulgarska Narodna Banka (BNB) (Bulgarian National Bank) (the central bank), Bulgarians sit at the foot of EU rankings of average monthly wages (€400) (US\$535).

In July 2013, the World Bank cut its 2013 growth forecast to 1.2 per cent, a figure that is above the European Commission (EC) estimates of 0.9 per cent, citing a general lag in global markets. While the EC projects Bulgaria's economy growing by 1.7 per cent, Oresharski opted to press for spending increases and to cut utility rates.

However, the fact that around half of the new spending in the budget amendments were unaccounted for, and coupled with the BSP's commitment to raising the flat 10 per cent rate (the lowest in the EU) of tax applied to Bulgarian incomes, the lack of specifics exacerbated an already contentious post-election environment.

A pair of questionable cabinet appointments – of Black Sea coastal developer Kalin Tiholov as investment planning minister and media mogul Delyan Peevski to head the national security agency (both later rescinded) – in the wake of his coalition's formation drew Bulgarians to the streets en masse. It earned the prime minister the nickname 'Oligarch-ski' and drew criticism from the president that the BSP-led government lacked credibility.

Plaudits for the programme

Despite ongoing and sustained revolt, officials from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in July 2013 applauded the Oresharski bid to jumpstart the middling economy. Following completion of a two-week visit that featured meetings with policymakers, mission chief Michele Shannon termed as 'welcome' increased expenditures in social protection as long as they remained within the framework of the 2013 budget.

She said the hard-money policy at the BNB has produced the financial stability that made the current stock of government paper resistant to turbulence in the broad European economy. However, she also noted that raising exports and more productive use of EU funds will provide keys to macroeconomic stability if the Oresharski government is to maintain policy continuity and address structural rigidities.

These include imbalances arising from an aging population and the drain on

KEY INDICATORS		Bulgaria				
	Unit	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Population	m	7.61	7.60	*7.53	7.36	*7.25
Gross domestic product (GDP)	US\$bn	52.00	47.10	47.70	53.50	*51.02
GDP per capita	US\$	6,857	6,223	6,359	7,153	*7,033
GDP real growth	%	6.2	-5.5	0.4	1.7	*0.8
Inflation	%	12.0	2.5	3.0	3.4	*2.4
Unemployment	%	5.6	6.8	10.2	12.0	*12.4
Industrial output	% change	3.0	-5.7	-3.8	-	-
Agricultural output	% change	24.6	-9.5	4.6	-	-
Coal output	mtoe	4.8	4.5	4.8	6.1	5.4
Exports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	22,585.5	16,502.7	20,608.2	28,192.2	26,707.0
Imports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	35,450.3	22,176.2	23,825.6	30,918.0	31,372.0
Balance of trade	US\$m	-12,864.8	-5,673.5	-3,217.4	-3,671.4	-4,665.0
Current account	US\$m	-12,073.0	-4,339.6	-578.0	-590.6	*-344.0
Total reserves minus gold	US\$m	16,815.5	17,127.3	15,420.5	15,759.2	18,371.0
Foreign exchange	US\$m	16,757.4	16,116.8	14,427.5	14,727.8	17,379.0
Exchange rate	per US\$	1.33	1.41	1.48	1.39	1.51

* estimated figure

economic activity as younger Bulgarians emigrate in search of more lucrative employment opportunities. Despite the subsistence-level pension payouts, demographic challenges are compromising the pension system, according to the IMF assessment.

Nevertheless, attempts by legislators to raise retirement ages for men and women, currently set at 63 and 61, respectively, in autumn 2011 sparked similar public outrage. At that juncture, the Borisov government backed down from a proposed one-year increase for both sexes. While at times effective – including in 1997 when popular dissent forced the fall of the BSP-led government of former Prime Minister Zhan Videnov – public protests were relatively rare in Bulgaria’s economic transition. However, thus empowered, public demonstrations and remonstrations are now par for the political course.

Reform commitment

In addition to its 1997 collapse amid hyper-inflation and accusations of corrupt practices in the mass privatisation of state-owned enterprises, the BSP’s reform record does not inspire confidence. In 2008, the EU froze payouts of €500 million (US\$667 million) in aid to the country due to corruption concerns in the coalition government headed by BSP party chief and current MP Sergei Stanishev, then the prime minister.

Given that EU funds were reckoned to account for around 65 per cent of GDP growth in 2011, keeping Brussels sweet is a key priority. In the election run-up, Oresharski had said that ‘close co-operation’ would be a hallmark of his administration. To smooth those relations, he installed Kristian Vigenin, a member of the European Parliament, as foreign minister. In addition, minister of justice Zinaida Zlatanova, who headed the EC’s representative office in Sofia, will also oversee deployment of EU structural aid as deputy prime minister.

Nevertheless, the public remain unconvinced as organised protests continued into the fourth quarter of 2013. Coupled with the rift between the prime minister and the president, this prompted speculation about not if but when fresh elections would be called.

Some observers suggested that the ability of protesters to endure the Balkan winter will prove pivotal. With European parliamentary elections set for April 2014, speculation is rife that voters may be asked to choose a new national government along with them.

Risk assessment

Politics	Poor
Economy	Fair
Regional stability	Good

COUNTRY PROFILE

Historical profile

The Bulgars were a Finno-Ugrian people, whose ancestors crossed the River Danube in the seventh century and merged with the Slavonic population. Bulgaria is the oldest surviving state in Europe to have retained its original name.

681 The state of Bulgaria was founded.

811–927 After defeating the Byzantine armies at the Battle of Pliska, Bulgaria expanded into the Balkans.

1014–18 The Byzantines regained control of lost territory and much of Bulgaria was again part of the Byzantine Empire.

1185–97 The Bulgarians revolted against Byzantine rule. Bulgaria re-emerged as a state and major Balkan empire.

1396 Bulgaria was conquered by Ottoman Turkey and became its European stronghold for the next 500 years.

1800s The Ottoman Empire began to fall apart as many Balkan states launched uprisings.

1878 Russia defeated Turkey and Bulgaria came into existence again as a sovereign state.

1908 German Ferdinand Saxe-Coburg-Gotha proclaimed himself King of Bulgaria.

1912 The Balkan powers of Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro defeated the remnants of the Ottoman Empire.

1913 In the Second Balkan War, Bulgaria tried to take Macedonia from Serbia, but was defeated. Balkan states ended the war by signing the Treaty of Bucharest, which also reduced the territorial size of Bulgaria.

1915 Bulgaria invaded Serbia and Macedonia, after joining on the side of the Central Powers (Germany and Austro-Hungary).

1918 The Entente powers (Great Britain, France and Russia) defeated Bulgaria and an armistice was signed in September.

The Bulgarian defeat led to the abdication of King Ferdinand I and his son, Boris, was crowned.

1923 As internal divisions intensified between the peasants, ethnic Macedonians and communists, the army overthrew the government, which was dominated by agrarian parties. Prime Minister Alexander Stambolisky was assassinated. Alexander Tsankov formed a new pro-democracy government.

1924–25 Violence from communist militants and Macedonian nationalists

prevented the Tsankov government from bringing political stability to Bulgaria. 1926 An ethnic Macedonian, Andrei Liapchev, replaced Tsankov as prime minister.

1929–31 The Great Depression devastated the Bulgarian economy. Thousands of jobs were lost and a wave of strikes hit the country. In the 1931 parliamentary election, the Liapchev government was defeated by the centre-left Narodnii Blok (NB) (People’s Bloc), led by Alexander Malinov.

1934 A coalition of political parties, led by the Zveno Group’s Kimon Georgiev and Colonel Dmyan Velchev of the Voenni Sayuz (VZ) (Military Union), overthrew Malinov’s government. The new government introduced one-party rule and turned Bulgaria into an authoritarian state.

1935 Disillusioned by the government’s authoritarianism, King Boris III began a personal dictatorship of Bulgaria.

1939–1941 Bulgaria was neutral at the start of the Second World War, but joined the Axis powers (Germany, Italy and Japan) in 1941. Bulgaria ruled German-captured Macedonia and Western Thrace in Greece.

1943 Boris III died of a heart attack. The heir to the Bulgarian throne, Simeon II, was too young to rule. A three-man regency was established and Prime Minister Bogdan Filov became the *de facto* head of state.

1944 The Soviet Union invaded Bulgaria. The Fatherland Front, a left-wing alliance dominated by the Soviet-backed Bulgarska Komunistieska Partija (BKP) (Bulgarian Communist Party), gained power.

1946 A referendum abolished the monarchy, which had ruled Bulgaria periodically since the ninth century.

1947 All opposition parties were abolished. Political trials and executions on the Stalinist model were carried out under Vulko Chervenkov until 1953 when Todor Zhivkov became the general secretary of the BKP.

1962–88 Zhivkov cemented his position as leader of Bulgaria and the country moved politically and economically closer to the Soviet Union.

1989 Petur Mladenov was appointed Zhivkov’s successor.

1990 The BCK changed its name to the Bulgarska Socialistieska Partija (BSP) (Bulgarian Socialist Party). The BSP won the first multi-party elections in Bulgaria since the inter-war period. However, growing political infighting and nationwide strikes led to its fall. An interim government was confirmed, under the leadership of Dimitur Popov.

1991 The BSP lost power in the parliamentary elections. The Sajuz na Demokratienite Sili (SDS) (Union of Democratic Forces) formed a government.

1992 The SDS's Zhelyu Zhelev became Bulgaria's first directly elected president.

1994 The BSP returned to government in the parliamentary elections.

1996 Simeon (Borisov) Sakskoburgotski (son of Boris III) returned to Bulgaria. Amid a severe economic and political crisis, Petar Stoyanov won the presidential elections.

1997 An early general election was held, resulting in a win for the SDS-led centre-right coalition, the Obedineni Demokratieni Sili (ODS) (United Democratic Forces).

2001 The Nacionale Dvisenie Simeon Tsvori (NDST) (National Movement for Simeon II) won the general election. The NDST's leader (former king Simeon II (1943–44)), became prime minister and formed a coalition government. The BSP's Georgi Parvanov won the run-off presidential elections.

2003 The IMF approved of Bulgaria's efforts to improve its macroeconomic situation with a loan of US\$36 million.

2004 Bulgaria joined NATO.

2005 The Koalicija za Balgarija (KzB) (Coalition for Bulgaria) (led by the BSP) won parliamentary elections, defeating the ruling NDST. Sergey Stanishev became prime minister.

2006 The European Union (EU) officially agreed to Bulgaria's membership. However, conditions were imposed, stronger than any placed on previous accession countries, to curb organised crime and corruption, plus the use of EU funding. In presidential elections Georgi Parvanov won a landslide victory with 77.3 per cent of the vote.

2007 Bulgaria joined the EU. The NDST became the Nacionalno Dvizenie za Stabilnost i Vazhod (NDSV) (National Movement for Stability and Progress).

2008 The EU judged that Bulgaria had not sufficiently tackled corruption and organised crime, as required by its entry agreement and suspended millions of euros in aid to upgrade roads and agriculture.

2009 Weeks of energy shortages were endured by Bulgarians after Ukraine, in dispute with Russia, cut Russian natural gas supplies to Bulgaria. The EU demanded the return of €33 million (US\$46.3 million) in farming subsidies that it claimed had been misappropriated. Parliamentary elections were won by Grazhdani za Evropeysko Razvitiie na Balgariya (Gerb) (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria) with 116 seats; BSP won 40 seats. Boyko Borisov (Gerb) became prime minister.

2010 Parliament approved measures to raise revenue and to further tackle the budget deficit, including by the sale of minority government holdings in companies and increased taxes on gambling and insurance premiums.

2011 In June, the EU approved Bulgaria's inclusion in the Schengen area (allowing passport-free travel of citizens and goods); however, The Netherlands vetoed the EU decision to admit Bulgaria and Romania, in view of the turmoil in the Middle East and the potential for Middle Eastern migration to the EU in 2011–12, and imposed a one-year delay. Bulgaria officially recognised the Transitional National Council (TNC) in Libya in June. Eighteen candidates took part in presidential elections held in October. Rosen Plavneliev (Gerb) won 40.11 per cent of the vote in the first round and Ivaylo Kaflian (BSP) 28.96 per cent; as none of the candidates won over 50 per cent of the votes a runoff was held on 30 October; Plavneliev won 52.58 per cent and Kaflian 47.42 per cent; turnout was 48.06 per cent.

2012 On 18 July, a suicide bomber killed five Israeli tourists, the bus driver and himself on a passenger bus at the Burgas airport. A meeting of the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council scheduled for 19–20 September, to discuss Bulgaria and Romania's admittance to the Schengen Area treaty, and The Netherlands' opposition, was postponed to 25–26 October. Deputy Prime Minister Simeon Djakov said Bulgaria had 'lost patience' and that The Netherlands 'has been changing the rules of the game for election campaign reasons'. On 21 September, parliament voted to establish a six-month, cross-party investigative committee into corruption by senior officials. At the 25–26 October meeting of the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council to discuss Bulgaria and Romania's admittance to the Schengen Area treaty, it was agreed to postpone the decision until March 2013.

2013 In February, Prime Minister Boiko Borisov became the US President Obama's first European leader to visit since his re-election. Corruption, high energy costs and low living standards lead to protests in Sofia on 12 February. Borisov accepted the resignation of finance minister Simeon Djankov after a row over farm subsidies, and promised to cut power costs. However, this was not enough to pacify the protesters and the government resigned on 20 February. Early elections were called for 12 May. President Rosen appointed Marin Raykov as provisional prime minister and minister of foreign affairs. Results of the May election were: GERB 30.54 per cent of the

vote (97 seats out of 240); BSP 26.61 per cent (84); DPS 11.31 per cent (36); Ataka (Attack) 7.3 per cent (23). Turnout was 51.33 per cent. President Plevneliev asked Borisov to form a government but he failed and the BSP were called instead. They successfully formed a coalition with the DPS and Plamen Oresharski was nominated as prime minister; he promised a technocratic cabinet and that he had always 'been skeptical towards the division between leftists and rightists. There are some situations in which the most important thing is a rational and pragmatic approach. The main criterion for the composition of the cabinet is expertise.'

Political structure

Constitution

A democratic constitution was passed in July 1991, defining Bulgaria as a republic with a parliamentary form of government.

Independence date

22 September 1908.

Form of state

Parliamentary democratic republic

The executive

The Council of Ministers is the supreme executive body of the government and usually consists of elected members of the National Assembly. The right to initiate new legislation is vested in the deputies and the Council of Ministers. The head of state is the president of the Republic, elected by a direct popular vote every five years, and assisted by a vice president. The president is not allowed to initiate or veto new laws, but can bring a law back to parliament for further consideration.

National legislature

The unicameral Narodno Sabranie (National Assembly) has 240 deputies elected for four-year terms by proportional representation in multi-seat constituencies.

Legal system

The legal system is based on the 1991 constitution.

The judiciary is the third component within the political system. It is an autonomous power with an independent budget. The Supreme Legal Council has 45 members. The Constitutional Court is the supreme arbiter.

Last elections

23 and 30 October 2011 (presidential, first round and runoff); 29 May 2013 (parliamentary)

Results: Parliamentary (2013): Grazhdani za Evropeysko Razvitiie na Balgariya (GERB) (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria) won 30.54 per cent of the vote (97 seats out of 240); Bulgarska Socialisticheska Partija (BSP) (Bulgarian Socialist Party) 26.61 per cent (84); Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi (DPS) (Movement for Rights and Freedom)

11.31 per cent (36); Ataka (Attack) 7.3 per cent (23). Turnout was 51.33 per cent.

Presidential (2011) (first round): Rosen Plavneliev (Gerb) won 40.11 per cent of the vote, Ivaylo Kafilin (BSP) 28.96 per cent, Meglena Kuneva (independent) 14 per cent; 15 other candidates each won less than 4 per cent of the vote. Turnout was 52.11 per cent. Runoff: Plavneliev won 52.58 per cent, Kafilin 47.42 per cent; turnout was 48.06 per cent.

Next elections

2013 (parliamentary); 2016 (presidential)

Political parties

Ruling party

Coalition of Bulgarska Socialistiiska Partija (BSP) (Bulgarian Socialist Party) and Attack (from 5 Jul 2013)

Main opposition party

Grazhdani za Evropeysko Razvitie na Bulgariya (GERB) (Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria)

Population

7.25 million (2012)

Bulgaria's birth rate, at eight per 1,000 of the population, is one of the lowest in the world.

Last census: 1 February 2011: 7,364,570

Population density: 74 inhabitants per square km. Urban population 71 per cent (2010 Unicef).

Annual growth rate: -0.8 per cent, 1990–2010 (Unicef).

Ethnic make-up

Turks, Gypsies (around one million in 2002), Russians, Armenians, Jews and Greeks.

Religions

Eastern Orthodoxy is the main religion, but Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim communities also exist.

Education

Primary education comprises basic education and pre-secondary education. Secondary school education lasts for four or five years and is provided in three types of schools – comprehensive (general secondary) schools, profile-oriented schools and vocational (technical and vocational-technical) schools. Universities, institutes and academies provide higher education. Some universities are private. Public expenditure on education is typically equivalent to 3.2 per cent of annual gross national income.

Literacy rate: 99 per cent adult rate; 100 per cent youth rate (15–24) (Unesco 2005).

Compulsory years: 7 to 18.

Enrolment rate: 100 per cent boys and 98 per cent girls, total primary school enrolment of the relevant age group, (World Bank).

Pupils per teacher: 17 in primary schools.

Health

The National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) is responsible for the development of the compulsory health insurance scheme in Bulgaria. Health insurance financing by the NHIF will replace funding through taxes for nearly 90 per cent of hospitals.

HIV/Aids

In 2009 there were an estimated 4,000 people living with HIV (Unicef 2012).

HIV prevalence: 0.1 per cent aged 15–49 in 2009 (Unicef 2012)

Life expectancy: 73 years, 2010 (Unicef 2012)

Fertility rate/Maternal mortality rate:

1.5 births per woman, 2010 (Unicef 2012); maternal mortality 1.5 per 1,000 live births (World Bank).

Child (under 5 years) mortality rate (per 1,000): 12 per 1,000 live births (WHO 2012)

Welfare

The Bulgarian social security system consists of a public pay-as-you-go system, a mandatory state-funded system of privately managed savings accounts and an additional voluntary private contribution.

The National Social Security Institute (NSSI) administers mandatory insurance programmes for maternity, sickness, disability and old age benefits including those related to work injuries and occupational diseases. It is also responsible for the collection, control and information services for all obligatory contributions. The current system of funding benefits was instigated in 2002. A mandatory social insurance scheme provides universal coverage for all members; contributions by individuals to a private insurance fund provide for old age pensions. These schemes are open to all employees, farmers, and artists who pay 21.75 per cent of earning for the social insurance and 0.5 per cent for the private insurance. Employers pay 8.25 per cent of payroll as a whole into these funds. The self-employed pay 31 per cent in total to the funds. The retirement is at aged 61.5 years (men) and 56.5 years (women), however the age is being increased every year until 2009 when retirement will be at age 63 (men) and 60 (women).

Main cities

Sofia (capital, estimated population 1.1 million in 2012), Plovdiv (350,718), Varna (331,540), Burgas (188,337), Ruse (155,372), Stara Zagora (143,154), Pleven (112,385), Sliven (102,141), Dobrich (101,478).

Languages spoken

Turkish (permitted since 1992), Macedonian, Romani, Gagauz, Tatar and Albanian.

Official language/s

Bulgarian

Media

The constitution guarantees freedom of the press.

Press

There are no laws regulating the print media, with publishing entirely liberated since the end of Communist control in 1989. Hybrid tabloids, which integrates elements of good journalism from the quality press with sensational stories, dominate the market.

In 2006 there were over 900 print media outlets, of which 15 were national and 10 regional, daily newspapers. All dailies have suffered from a steady drop in circulation figures and a sustainable market is dissipating.

Dailies: In Bulgarian, but with English online editions, include *Dnevnik* (<http://news.dnevnik.bg>), the leading quality newspaper and *Standart* (<http://standartnews.com>); others include *24 Chasa* (www.24chasa.bg), *Trud* (www.trud.bg), *Novinar* (www.novinar.org), and the *Monitor* (www.monitor.bg). The only English-language newspaper is *The Sofia Echo* (www.sofiaecho.com).

Weeklies: There are a variety of magazines for all interest groups. In Bulgarian, *Tema* (www.temanews.com) is a leading magazine for politics and current affairs, others include *7 din Sport* (www.7sport.net), *Novo Vreme* (www.novovreme.com) and *Kultura* (www.online.bg/kultura), which is published by the government.

Business: In Bulgarian, *Pari* (www.pari.bg) is a daily, with an English online edition; *Capital* (www.capital.bg) and the *Banker* (www.banker.bg), are both weeklies.

Broadcasting

Radio: The Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) (www.bnr.bg) has the largest market share with two national, public stations and regional services as well as an international service. There are over 100 private commercial stations, with over 30 in Sophia alone. *Darik Radio* (<http://dariknews.bg>), is a private national network. Regional stations include *Radio Info* (www.inforadio.bg), with news and information, from Sophia, *Jazz FM* (www.jazzfmbg.com) from Blagoevgrad and *Radio Mixx* (www.radiomixx.net), from Burgas.

Television: There are three national, commercial networks broadcasting for 24 hours. They include the public, Bulgarian

National Television (www.bnt.bg) operates Kanal 1 and a satellite channel, the private bTV (www.btv.bg) with the largest audience and Nova Televisia (www.ntv.bg). There are over 180 registered cable TV operators throughout the country with digital TV services due to be fully implemented by 2015.

National news agency: Bulgarian News Agency (BTA)

Other news agencies: BGnes: www.bgnes.com

Focus: www.focus.bg

Mediapool: www.mediapool.bg

Novinite (in English): www.novinite.com

SEENews (in English): www.seenews.com

Economy

Bulgaria has a mixed economy based on mature industries such as mining, iron and steel, construction material manufacturing, oil refining and light engineering. It has also increased its manufacturing sector in electronics, clothing, food-processing and automotive components. Tourism has grown slightly quicker than the European Union (EU), average, and far higher than other non-EU Eastern European destinations.

Since 1994 the government has implemented conservative fiscal policies and tax reforms that have allowed the economy to grow at a steady rate. Foreign direct investment (FDI) reached a record high of US\$13.2 billion in 2007, but as the global economic crisis cut world trade and investors became less inclined to part with their money, FDI fell to US\$1.8 billion in 2011.

GDP growth was 6.2 per cent in 2008, having remained at around this since 2005. However, the economy fell into recession in 2009 with GDP growth of -5.5 per cent, which increased household debt, resulting in a rise in unemployment of 9.3 per cent. GDP growth rose to 0.4 per cent in 2010, and to have grown further to an estimated 1.7 per cent in 2011. The annual inflation rate, which had been below 8 per cent (2001–07) jumped to 12 per cent in 2008, before falling back to 2.5–3 per cent (2009–11).

An 'anti-crisis' plan was introduced by the government, in co-ordination with a worldwide programme to keep the global economy moving and avoid a damaging depression. In 2010, parliament approved measures to raise revenue and decrease the budget deficit that included sale of minority government holdings in companies and increased taxes on gambling and insurance premiums.

When Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007 one specific stipulation for membership was that the government must tackle corruption and organised crime. In 2008 the European Commission declared that this

had not been sufficiently robust and suspended financial aid and in 2009 requested the return of €33 million (US\$46.3 million) in farming subsidies that it claimed had been fraudulently misappropriated. In 2010, the newly elected government had committed itself to fighting corruption (including cronyism and nepotism). A European Commission report published in June 2012 said that Bulgaria ranked highest in the EU for the percentage of people employed in the grey economy, at around 30 per cent.

External trade

As a member of the European Union, Bulgaria operates within a community-wide free trade area, with tariffs set as a whole. Internationally, the EU has free trade agreements with a number of nations and trading blocs worldwide.

Energy accounts for over 20 per cent of all exports.

Imports

Principal imports include crude oil and natural gas, mining, metallurgical and petroleum equipment, raw materials, perfumes and cosmetics, vehicles, chemicals and plastics.

Main sources: Russia (20.8 per cent total in 2012), Germany (11.1 per cent), Italy (6.6 per cent).

Exports

Significant exports include energy, footwear and clothing, iron and steel, copper, machinery and equipment and fuels.

Main destinations: Germany (10.2 per cent of total in 2012), Turkey (9.4 per cent), Italy (8.5 per cent).

Agriculture

Agriculture accounts for around 11 per cent of GDP. About 16 per cent of Bulgaria's workforce is employed in farming. Land for agricultural use covers 6.16 million hectares (ha). Principal crops are wheat, maize, barley, sugar beet; other crops include sunflowers, grapes and tobacco.

Official policy towards land reform has mainly focused on restoring property rights, which included over 99.58 per cent of agricultural land and 90 per cent for wooded areas.

With the exception of cereals, farm prices and trade have been liberalised. The outlook for wheat producers has brightened since the reduction of a 15 per cent tax on wheat export earnings to 10 per cent. There is a sizeable wine industry, which accounts for around a third of agricultural exports. Bulgaria exports 80 per cent of its wine output, amounting to about 220,000 litres, of which 25 per cent are exported to the UK, still the biggest market for Bulgarian wine.

Long-term development of agriculture is based on further concentration and

specialisation, mechanisation, improved irrigation, increased grain production and expansion of the dairy sector. The government offers subsidised credits to farmers owning more than 10 cows.

Bulgaria's implementation of EU fisheries legislation is yet to be completed. Since progress in the compilation of standardised market data has been slow, privatisation of the processing and marketing sectors has been largely affected. Bulgaria is collaborating on a draft convention on fishing and conservation of resources in the Black Sea, which provides an abundance of fish for domestic and external markets, although it is under-utilised. The main species caught include sprats, mussels and turbot.

Forest and other wooded land accounts for over a third of the total land area, with 3.6 million hectares of forest cover. The proportion of forest cover has been increasing as a result of afforestation intended chiefly for soil protection, rather than wood production. Plantations account for more than a quarter of the forest area.

Most of the forest and wooded land is available for wood supply with the main species being beech and oak. Coniferous species include Norwegian spruce and Austrian pine. Up until 1999, all of the forests were state-owned, but by 2002 some 33 per cent were state-owned, 50 per cent municipal and 17 per cent privately owned.

Local demand for sawn wood, panels, pulp and paper is generally met by using domestic wood. Large amounts of sawlogs are also exported.

Industry and manufacturing

The industrial sector accounts for around 30 per cent of GDP and employs 38 per cent of the workforce.

Economic growth in the 1990s was led by the manufacturing sector, which contributes around 18 per cent to GDP. The industrial sector is well-developed, and the metal processing, machine building, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, electronics, textiles and food-processing sectors are particularly strong.

The machine building sector includes over 400 enterprises specialising in various areas including casting, machine tools, wood processing machines, machines for the mining industry, machines for the textile industry, machines for the food processing industry, agricultural machines, shipbuilding, vehicle manufacture, fine mechanics, metal constructions and household instruments.

The Great Wall Motor Company (TGWMC) of China is scheduled to begin car production in Bulgaria in February 2011. Investment by TGWMC of US\$400

million, with an initial US\$114 million, will provide an annual output capacity of 1,000 units of a sport utility vehicle, with a planned sale price of less than US\$15,000. The plant will be managed and operated by the Bulgarian company Litex Motors. At maximum capacity, the plant is expected to produce 50,000 mixed units with the principal market in Eastern Europe before expanding into southern Europe.

The key markets are the EU (particularly Germany and the Netherlands), Russia and North America.

Since 2003, the manufacturing sector has picked up and there has been an improvement in export performance, with total industrial production increasing by over 5 per cent in 2004.

Tourism

The main tourist attractions in Bulgaria are Black Sea resorts, including health spas, snow sports, historic sites and activity holidays in general. Bulgaria is one of the most visited countries in south-eastern Europe and tourism is an important component of the economy. Romanians, Greeks and Germans are the principal visitors, accounting for over 2.5 million in 2010, out of a total of 4.3 million. Bulgaria has seven historical and two natural sites on the Unesco World Heritage List. Travel and tourism constituted 14.8 per cent of GDP in 2011, a significant fall from the 24.6 per cent in 2004. This reflects strength in other sectors of the economy rather than a weakness in tourist industry, which registered growth in 2010–11. The value to the economy was US\$7 billion in 2011 and US\$6.2 in 2004. In the first three quarters of 2011 Bulgaria registered the biggest year-on-year increase of 19.9 per cent in visitors staying overnight of any EU country, despite the numbers increasing by only 4.5 per cent over January–November 2011.

The government has upgraded tourist infrastructure and private investment has improved accommodation and resort facilities. In 2011 capital investment in travel and tourism was US\$624 million (6 per cent of total investment) and was a 2 per cent real growth in industry investment, compared to the significant loss of investment to tourism in 2009–10 (US\$1.5 billion invested in 2008). In May 2012 the EU granted €150 million (US\$192 million) to restore 11 castles and other ancient monuments around Bulgaria.

Mining

The mining sector accounts for 2 per cent of GDP and employs 2 per cent of the workforce.

Bulgaria has some deposits of iron, manganese and chromium, and large reserves of zinc, lead and copper.

Apart from zinc, lead and copper, the non-ferrous ores contain some gold, silver and other precious metals. The Chala gold deposit in the area of Haskovski Mineralni Bani is one of Bulgaria's richest. The average gold content is higher than that in Madjarovo where it exceeds three grams per tonne.

Large deposits of copper ore have been discovered in the Sredna Gora mountains.

There are deposits of marl, limestone, granite, sandstone and clay, and plenty of stone which can be used in the building industry.

Hydrocarbons

Proven oil reserves were negligible in 2010 and consumption was 93,000 barrels per day (bpd) leaving Bulgaria a net importer of oil, with most of its supply coming from Russia. Known oil and natural gas deposits are of small amounts and at considerable depth. Exploration for oil and gas is concentrated in the north of the country and in the Black Sea.

The Balkans are a major transit region for oil and gas. In 2008 Bulgaria ratified the US\$1.2 billion pipeline deal previously agreed between Russia, Bulgaria and Greece in 2007. The pipeline will run inland from Burgas to the northern Greek town of Alexandroupolis on the Aegean Sea and carry 750,000 barrels per day. Russian oil will be transported via the 285km pipeline to the huge EU market, avoiding the busy Bosphorus exit to the Mediterranean, where oil tankers can wait for days. A Russian consortium will hold a 51 per cent stake in the deal to build and operate the pipeline and a joint Greek/Bulgarian consortium 24.5 per cent each.

Natural gas reserves and production were negligible in 2010 and Bulgaria is dependent on Russia for the 2.6 billion cubic metres it consumes annually. They have an agreement in place, lasting up to 2018, guaranteeing Russian gas supplies. Bulgaria also transits Russian gas to other countries in Europe.

In February 2012, the multinational, South Stream Transport group, announced the expected construction of the South Stream pipeline, to transport Russian natural gas to Western and Central Europe (and bypassing Ukraine) would begin in December 2012.

Proven reserves of coal were 2.36 billion tonnes at the end of 2010, of which the majority is the lesser quality brown coal, with low calorific value, which is used in power stations. Production was 4.8 million tonnes in 2010.

Energy

The most recent published figures for 2006 show total generating power at 43.15 billion kWh, which was an increase of 1.4 billion kWh on the 2005 figure.

Bulgaria's installed electricity capacity is approximately 1,250MW, composed of 580MW of coal-powered thermal power, 380MW of nuclear power and 290MW of hydroelectric power.

The coal-fired Maritsa Iztok complex accounts for 60 per cent of all power generated. A new thermal plant, agreed in December 2005, is to be constructed at Maritsa Iztok to replace capacity lost by the closure of two nuclear reactors at the Kozloduy power plant after the EU had raised safety concerns. The government has plans to build a new nuclear power plant on the river Danube, to take over when the remaining plants go off-line. Annual production was 3.3 million tonnes oil equivalent (mtoe). The new plant is expected to keep Bulgaria as the leading exporter of electricity in the Balkans.

Financial markets

Stock exchange

Bulgarska fondova borsa (Bulgarian Stock Exchange) (BSE)

Commodity exchange

Sofia Commodity Exchange

Banking and insurance

There is a two-tier system in which an independent central bank supervises and regulates commercial banks and has exclusive rights over the issue of currency. There are approximately 33 commercial banks, with total bank credit to the private sector accounting for 14 per cent of GDP, one of the lowest rates of former Soviet countries.

Central bank

Bulgarska Narodna Banka (BNB) (Bulgarian National Bank)

Time

GMT plus two hours (daylight saving, late March to late October, GMT plus three hours)

Geography

Bulgaria lies in south-eastern Europe, on the east of the Balkan Peninsula. It is situated on the western shores of the Black Sea and shares borders with Romania to the north, Turkey to the south-east, Greece to the south, Macedonia (FYROM) to the south-west and Serbia to the north-west. The lower River Danube forms most of the border with Romania. The Balkan Mountains dominate central Bulgaria, running from west to east and separating the Danubian plains in the north from the Thracian plains of Eastern Rumelia in the south-east. The Rhodope Mountains occupy south-west Bulgaria

and separate it from Greece and Macedonia.

The Sofia depression in the west of the country is hill country which separates the Balkan Mountains from the southern mountains. It is the main centre of population and communications.

The fertile Bulgarian plateau, between the Danubian border and the Balkan Mountains, averages some 100km in width and contains several tributaries of the Danube, the major one being the Iskur. The main rivers south of the Balkan watershed are the Struma and the Maritza which run into the Aegean Sea. The broad Maritza Valley, which leads on to the Thracian plains, is one of the principal agricultural areas.

Hemisphere

Northern

Climate

Summer is hot and dry, April–September average temperature 23 degrees Celsius (C). Cold winters, average temperature minus 1 degree C, with heavy snow.

Dress codes

Dress for business is usually quite conservative but not overly formal.

Entry requirements

Passports

Passports are required by all visitors. As from 1 January 2006, all visitors staying for longer than 24 hours must be registered with the authorities; hotels will automatically undertake this task.

Visa

Not required by citizens of Europe, North America, Australasia and some Asian countries for either 90 or 30 days. Full details and information can be found at www.bulgariatravel.org and see 'getting to Bulgaria'.

Businessmen from visa-free states may visit without a visa for up to 30 days. All other businessmen must apply for visas and include a letter of invitation from a company registered in Bulgaria endorsed by the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce. All visitors, tourist and business, must have travel and medical insurance to cover emergency medical expenses, repatriation, transport of mortal remains, funeral and hospitalisation. A copy of the policy, with legible policy number, company name, duration of validity and sum of coverage or a letter from the insurance company including such data, should be submitted with the application.

Currency advice/regulations

The import and export of local currency up to Lev5,000 is allowed without restrictions. Between Lev5,000–20,000 import and export is permitted if the amount was declared on arrival. The import and export of over Lev20,000 is allowed only

with written permission from the central bank.

Foreign currency may be imported in unlimited amounts, but must be declared on arrival; export of foreign cannot exceed the amount imported and declared.

A *bordereaux* is issued to all visitors on arrival, to record all money exchanges and must be returned to the authorities when departing. Local currency can only be exchanged on departure with the *bordereaux*. Visitors are advised to exchange money in banks and hotels. ATMs are widespread; check with the card provider concerning terms and conditions. Travellers cheques are accepted in major hotels and establishments; US dollars and pound sterling attract less additional rate charges.

Customs

Small quantities of spirits, wines and beverages are allowed in duty-free. Valuable personal effects should be declared verbally to Customs on entry. There are no restrictions on goods bought for foreign exchange in duty free shops at ports of entry.

Health (for visitors)

Foreign travellers must present valid evidence of health insurance to the Bulgarian border authorities in order to be admitted into the country.

Mandatory precautions

None

Advisable precautions

Recommended immunisations: hepatitis A, polio, tetanus and typhoid.

Hotels

Deluxe, first- and second-class ratings system. Hotels have been upgraded to attract business people. Radisson, Sheraton and Hilton groups have hotels in Sofia.

Credit cards

Main international credit cards are accepted in larger hotels and stores in larger cities, and in some restaurants in Sofia.

Public holidays (national)

Fixed dates

1 Jan (New Year's Day), 3 Mar (National Day), 1 May (Labour Day), 6 May (St George's Day), 24 May (St Cyril and Methodius Day/Culture Day), 6 Sep (Unification Day), 22 Sep (Independence Day), 24–26 Dec (Christmas).

Variable dates

Orthodox Good Friday, Orthodox Easter Monday.

Working hours

Banking

Mon–Fri: 0800–1230, 1330–1530; Sat: 0830–1130.

Business

Mon–Fri: 0800 (0900)–1730 (1800).

Government

Mon–Fri: 0800 (0900)–1730 (1800).

Shops

Mon–Fri: 1000–2000; Sat: 0800–1400.

Telecommunications

Mobile/cell phones

There is good GSM coverage of 3G, with nationwide coverage of GSM 900 and 1800.

Electricity supply

220–240V AC/50 HZ

Social customs/useful tips

A nod of the head means 'No', a shake of the head means 'Yes'. Shaking hands is the traditional form of greeting. It is usual to invite your host to a good restaurant.

Security

By Western standards, the streets of Sofia and other towns and cities are generally safe. Street crime is slowly rising and the usual precautions should be taken.

Getting there

Air

National airline: Bulgaria Air

Hemus Air connects Sofia to some European and Middle Eastern destinations.

International airport/s: Sofia (SOF) airport, 10km east of the city centre. Facilities include banks, post office, duty-free shops, restaurant and car hire.

By day, buses run every 10 minutes to the city, at night they run every 20 minutes between 2100–0030. Taxis are available, if the metre is not in use, a fare may have to be negotiated before travelling.

Other airport/s: Varna (VAR), 9km from city; Burgas (BOJ), 13km from city.

Airport tax: None, except US nationals who are charged US\$20.

Surface

Road: The pan-European corridor, which is being built or existing roads upgraded, links Bulgaria to the European motorway network. Border crossings exist from all surrounding countries; new roads and border controls are planned with Turkey, Greece and Serbia. The Trans-European Motorway (TEM), includes routes connecting Budapest with Athens via Sofia and with Istanbul via eastern Bulgaria. In July 2006 the proposal for a north-south road tunnel under Shipka Mountain estimated at US\$120 million, was still under consideration.

Rail: There are no direct rail services between Bulgaria and Western Europe. Links exist to Serbia, Turkey, Romania and Greece.

Water: Ships provide regular passenger service and cruises on the Danube, starting at Passau in Germany, to Vienna, passing through Slovakia, Hungary and

Serbia. There are also links with the Rhine, Black Sea and Main.

Main port/s: Burgas, Varna.

Getting about

National transport

Air: Bulgaria Air operates a domestic flight from Sofia to Varna. Hemus Air connects Sofia to the Black Sea cities of Varna and Bourgas.

Road: The overall quality of the 13,000km of roads linking the major cities is good but some roads are in poor repair and full of potholes. International road signs are used and traffic drives on the right.

Rail: Approximately 6,500km of track connect all main towns. First-class travel is recommended. It is necessary to make reservations.

City transport

Taxis: Taxis are plentiful and cheap. Official taxis have meters, although some privately operated ones may not. A 5–10 per cent tip in local currency is usual. Taxis to Sofia airport have a journey time of 15 minutes. Fares should be agreed before departure.

Buses, trams & metro: Efficient and cheap tram and bus services operate in Sofia. Flat rate fares are charged. Trolleybus services are available in Plovdiv and Varna.

Buses to the city centre from the airport run every 10 minutes during the day and every 20 minutes between 2100–0030, and take 25 minutes.

Car hire

An international driving permit is required. A green card (international car insurance) is compulsory. Most car hire accounts are transacted in hard currency. Drivers are normally given special petrol coupons, which can be used throughout the country. Speed limits: out of town 90kph and 120kph on motorways, in town 50kph. Drinking and driving is strictly prohibited. There are tolls on motorways and other major roads.

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

The addresses listed below are a selection only. While World of Information makes every endeavour to check these addresses, we cannot guarantee that changes have not been made, especially to telephone numbers and area codes. We would welcome any corrections.

Telephone area codes

The international direct dialling (IDD) code for Bulgaria is +359, followed by area code and subscriber's number:

Blagoevgrad	73	Rousse	82
Burgas	56	Smolyan	301
Dobritch	58	Sofia	2
Gabrovo	66	Stara Zagora	42
Lovech	68	Varna	52

Plovdiv 32 Veliko Tŕrnovo 62

Useful telephone numbers

Ambulance: 150
 Fire brigade: 160
 Police: 166
 Operator: 121 (inland); 123 (international)
 Directory enquiries: 144 (business); 145 (domestic lines)
 Traffic police: 165
 Road service: 91-146

Chambers of Commerce

American Chamber of Commerce in Bulgaria, Building 2, Mladost 4 Area, Business Park Sofia, 1715 Sofia (tel: 976-9565; fax: 976-9569; e-mail: amcham@amcham.bg).

British Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce, 8 Charles Darwin Street, 1113 Sofia (tel: 971-4756; fax: 738-331; e-mail: info@bbcc.bg).

Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 42 Parchevich Street, 1058 Sofia (tel: 987-2631; fax: 987-3209; e-mail: bcci@bcci.bg).

Burgas Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 12B L Karavelov Street, PO Box 644, 8000 Sofia (tel: 812-007; fax: 810-130; e-mail: bscci@bcci.bg).

Dobritch Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 14 Nezavisimost Street, PO Box 182, 9300 Dobritch (tel: 601-433; fax: 601-434; e-mail: dbcci@bcci.bg).

Gabrovo Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 1Vazrazhdane Square, PO Box 217, 5300 Gabrovo (tel: 288-39; fax: 341-83; e-mail: gbcci@mbox.eda.bg).

Plovdiv Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 7 Samara Street, 4003 Plovdiv (tel: 652-645; fax: 652-647; e-mail: pccci@plovdiv-chamber.org).

Sousse Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 3 A Ferdinand Boulevard, PO Box 484, 7000 Rousse (tel: 825-884; fax: 825-873; e-mail: info@chamber.rousse.bg).

Stara Zagora Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 66 GS Rakovski Street, 6000 Stara Zagora (tel: 461-94; fax: 260-33; e-mail: office@chambersz.com).

Varna Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 135 Primorsky Boulevard, 9000 Varna (tel: 615-140; fax: 612-146; e-mail: office@vcci.bg).

Banking

Biochim Bank, 1 Ivan Vazov Street, 1040 Sofia (tel: 926-9210; fax: 981-9151; e-mail: info@biochim.com).

BulBank Ltd, 7 Sveta Nedelya Square, 1000 Sofia (tel: 984-1111; fax: 988-4636, 988-5370; e-mail: infor@sof.bulbank.bg).

Bulgarian Post Bank, 1 Bulgaria Square, 1414 Sofia (tel: 963-2104/5; e-mail: iap@postbank.bg).

DSK Bank, 19 Moskovska Street, 1040 Sofia (tel: 939-1220; fax: 980-6477).

Central bank

Bulgarska Narodna Banka, 1 Alexander Battenberg Square, 1000 Sofia (tel: 91-459 fax: 980-2425).

Stock exchange

Balgarska fondova borsa (Bulgarian Stock Exchange) (BSE), www.bse-sofia.bg

Commodity exchange

Sofia Commodity Exchange

Sofia Commodity Exchange, Sofia (tel: 952 6212, 952 6225, 952 6203; fax: 952 6232; e-mail: sce@sce-bg.com; www.sce-bg.com).

Travel information

Bulgaria Air, 1 Brussels blvd, Sofia Airport Sofia 1540 (tel: 402-0306; fax: 937-3254; email: office@air.bg; internet: www.air.bg/en/).

Balkantourist, 2 Enos Street, 1408 Sofia (tel: 981-9806; fax: 988-4177; email: sofia.agency@balkantourist.bg; internet: www.balkantourist.bg).

Central Railway Station, Maria Luisa Boulevard, Sofia (tel: 31-111; internet: www.sofia.com/transport).

Hemos Air, Airport Sofia, 1 Brussels Blvd, Sofia 1540 (tel: 942-0202; fax: 945-9147; email: office@hemusair.bg; internet: www.hemusair.bg).

Sofia Airport (email: public@sofia-airport.bg; internet: www.sofia-airport.bg/En).

National tourist organisation offices

Bulgarian Tourism Authority, 1 Sveta Nedelia Square, 1000 Sofia (tel: 987-9778; fax: 989-6939; email: webmaster@bulgariatravel.org; internet: www.bulgariatravel.org).

Ministries

Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, 55 Hristo Botev Boulevard, 1000 Sofia (tel: 981-1546; fax: 885-557).

Ministry of Culture, 17 Alexander Stamboliiski Boulevard., 1000 Sofia (tel: 980-5384; fax: 981-8145).

Ministry of Defence, 3 Vassil Levsky Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 862-4135; fax: 873-626).

Ministry of Economy, 12 Kniaz Alexander Batenberg Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 981-9965, 987-9778; fax: 981-2515, 981-5039).

Ministry of Education and Science, 2a Doundukov Boulevard, 1000 Sofia (tel: 84-81; fax: 987-1289).

Nations of the World: A Political, Economic and Business Handbook

Ministry of Environment and Waters, 67 Gladstone Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 814-269; fax: 521-634).

Ministry of Finance, 102 Georgi Rakovski Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 869-1870; fax: 980-6863); external department (tel: 869-223; fax: 876-008).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2 Alexander Jendov Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 714-3507; fax: 736-069).

Ministry of Health, 5 Sveta Nedelya Square, 1000 Sofia (tel: 86-31; fax: 875-040).

Ministry of the Interior, 23 Gurko Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 877-511; fax: 824-047).

Ministry of Justice, 1 Slavianska Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 86-01; fax: 876-3226).

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2 Triaditza Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 981-1717; fax: 800-609).

Ministry of Regional and Urban Development, 17 Kiril & Methodius Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 83-841; fax: 872-517).

Ministry of Transport, 9 Levski Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 872-862; fax: 885-094).

Council of Ministers, 1 Dondoukov Blvd., 1000 Sofia (tel: 8501; fax: 884-252).

Other useful addresses

Agency for Economic Co-ordination and Development, 1 Vassil Levsky Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 543-386; fax: 833-323).

Agency for Privatisation, 29 Aksakov St, 1000 Sofia (tel: 873-188; fax: 882-938, 885-395).

Amex Representative Office, BICD, Rila Hotel, 6 Kalojan Street, Sofia 1000 (tel: 871-516).

Board of Customs Houses at the Ministry of Finance, 1 Aksakov Street, Sofia 1000 (tel: 869-528; fax: 884-909).

British Embassy, 38 Boulevard Vassil, Levski, Sofia 1000 (tel: 980-1220; fax: 988-5367).

Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 1 7-mi Noemvri Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 841-41; fax: 803-023).

Bulgarian Embassy (USA), 1621 22nd Street, NW, Washington DC 20008 (tel: (+1-202) 387-0174; fax: (+1-202) 234-7973; e-mail: office@bulgaria-embassy.org).

Bulgarian Foreign Investment Agency, 3 Sveta Sofia Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 980-0918; fax: 980-1320; e-mail: fia@geobiz.com; internet site: www.bfia.org).

Bulgarian Industrial Association (BISA), 14 Alabin Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 879-611, 872-960; fax: 872-604).

Bulgarian National Television, 29 San Stefano Str, 1504 Sofia (tel: 446-329; fax: 662-388).

Bulgarian News Agency (BTA), 49 Tzarigradsko Chaussee Blvd, 1024 Sofia (tel: 877-363, 877-739; fax: 802-488).

Bulgarian Telecommunication Company (BTC), 8 Totleben Blvd (tel: 870-143; fax: 875-885).

Bulgarian Telegraph Agency, Trakija Boulevard 49, Sofia (tel: 8461).

Bulgarian Translators' Union, 16 Graf Ignatiev Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 661-602, 662-564; fax: 510-845, 661-233).

Bulgarreklama (trade show agency), 147 Tzarigradsko Chaussee Blvd, 1784 Sofia 1784 (tel: 965-5220; fax: 965-5230; email: bul-reklama@bulgarreklama.com; internet: www.bulgarreklama.com).

Central Co-operative Union, 99 Rakovski Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 84-41; fax: 878-157).

Central Post Office, 4 Gurko Street, Sofia.

Committee for Energy, 8 Triaditza Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 861-91; fax: 876-279).

Committee for Forests, 17 Antim I Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 861-71; fax: 873-235).

Committee for Geology and Mineral Resources, 22 Maria Louisa Blvd, 1000 Sofia (tel: 832-767; fax: 833-976).

Committee for Posts and Telecommunications, 6 Gourko Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 889-646, 871-837; fax: 814-512, 800-044).

Committee for Television, 29 San Stefano Street, 1504 Sofia (tel: 43-481).

Committee for Standardisation and Metrology, 21 6-ti Septemvri Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 85-91; fax: 801-402).

EU Energy Centre (Thermie), 51 James Boucher Blvd, 1407 Sofia (tel: 681-461, 683-542; fax: 681-461).

Euro Information Centre, Network/Correspondence Centre, 54 Dr GM Dimitrov Blv, 1125 Sofia (tel: 738-448; fax: 730-435).

First Bulgarian Stock Exchange, 1 Macedonia Square, 1040 Sofia (tel: 815-711; fax: 875-566; internet site: www.bse-sofia.bg).

Foreign Aid Agency, 1 Vrabcha Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 881-951; fax: 885-039).

Intercommerce (import, export, re-export and transit operations, compensation deals and foreign trade transactions), 21 Aksakov Str, 1000 Sofia (tel: 879-364; fax: 873-753).

International Fair – Plovdiv, G. Dimitrov Boulevard 37 (tel: 553-191, 553-146, 26-129, 26-139).

International Road Transport (SO MAT), Gorublyane, 1738 Sofia (tel: 712-121, 758-015; fax: 758-015).

Interpred World Trade Centre (representation of foreign companies), 36 Dragan Tzankov Boulevard, 1040 Sofia (tel: 7146-4646; fax: 700-006, 706-401).

Law Offices for Foreign Legal Matters (tel: 877-782).

Medical Industry Association, Bademova Gora Street 20-a, Sofia 1404 (tel: 592-111).

Scientific Institute for International Co-operation and Foreign Economic Activities, 3A 165 Street, Zh K Izgreva, 1113 Sofia (tel: 708-336; fax: 705-154, 700-131).

Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SME) Development Programme, Agency for Privatisation, 29 Aksakov Str, 1046 Sofia (tel: 871-913; fax: 871-912).

Sofia Press Agency, 113 Tzarigradsko Shosse Blvd. (tel: 878-428; fax: 883-455).

Sofia Customs Office, 1 Aksakov Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 800-402; fax: 884-909).

State Insurance Institute, 3 Benkovski Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 879-341; fax: 871-429).

Union for Private Economic Enterprise, 2a Suborna Street, 1000 Sofia (tel: 659-371; fax: 659-411).

National news agency: Bulgarian News Agency (BTA)

49 Tzarigradsko Chaussee Blvd, 1124 Sofia, (tel: 9262-279, 9262-205; email: dnews@bta.bg; internet: www.bta.bg).

Other news agencies: BGnes: www.bgnes.com

Focus: www.focus.bg

Mediapool: www.mediapool.bg

Novinite (in English): www.novinite.com

SEENews (in English): www.seenews.com

Internet sites

Background information on the government and useful links:

www.vii.org/afgrbulg.htm

Bulgaria business catalogue and useful links: www.bulgaria.com

Bulgarian Economic Forum: www.biforum.org

Bulgaria financial and business newspaper: www.pari.bg

Bulgarian International Business Association: www.biba.bg

Bulgarian News Agency: www.bta.bg/site/en/indexe.shtml

SG Expressbank AD: www.sgexpressbank.b