
**BULGARIAN
PRESIDENCY
OF THE COUNCIL
OF THE
EUROPEAN
UNION**





GENERAL INFORMATION

Bulgaria has long served as cultural hub in Europe's south-east, as it shares borders with Romania, Serbia and Macedonia as well as Greece, Turkey and the Black Sea. After nearly 500 years of Ottoman rule, Bulgaria proclaimed its independence in 1908. Following the Second World War and Soviet occupation, Bulgaria held its first free elections in 1990. The constitution adopted in 1991 formalised the parliamentary republic and the social constitutional state, in which the president takes on a representative function. The unicameral parliament is put together by proportional representation. Bulgaria became a member of the European Union in 2007, however, it has not yet joined the Schengen area. Neither has it adopted the euro, making the Lev the official currency. Already in 2004, Bulgaria became a member of NATO. Approximately 7.1 million people are living in an area of 110 994 km², with its capital Sofia counting 1.2 million inhabitants.

The official language is Bulgarian, which has a Slavic origin written in Cyrillic script. After snap elections were held in March 2017, incumbent Boyko Borissov of the GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria) party was re-elected Prime Minister. In 2017, former Bulgarian MEP Mariya Gabriel became Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society. ■

ECONOMY

Despite declining unemployment, with an estimated GDP of €7.300 per capita in 2016 according to the International Monetary Fund, Bulgaria ranks last in the EU28 economies, also in price levels. The Bulgarian economy mainly relies on the energy, mining, machine building and agriculture sector, as well as tourism. Economic growth builds primarily on the export sectors, especially in the areas of IT, electronics and engineering. The service sector accounts for 67.4% of annual GDP, industry for 27.5% and agriculture for 5.1%. Bulgaria's

main trading partners are Germany and Italy as well as its direct neighbours Turkey, Romania and Greece. Bulgaria has been experiencing steady economic growth since the global financial crisis. Industrial production states the most important branch of the Bulgarian economy, employing 30% of the working population. Due to emigration of primarily young people, the Bulgarian population is among the oldest worldwide. Bulgaria's current debt level in relation to its GDP currently stands at 24.6% and is thus one of the lowest in Europe. Its fiscal policies have been prioritising a balanced budget. The declared aim of the Bulgarian Presidency is to bring the country economically closer to Europe. To help achieve this, Bulgaria can access €7.6 million in EU structural funding for the period of 2014 – 2020. ■



PRIORITIES

WESTERN BALKANS

The Bulgarian Presidency will focus on strengthening regional co-operation and developing good relations to its respective neighbours, especially the Western Balkans. Here, providing connectivity will be a key issue, e.g. regarding transport, air, energy, education and digital aspects. The Presidency aims at developing an action plan for each of the respective countries, as by this, peace, security and prosperity can be fostered in the area. Yet, it wants to avoid unrealistic expectations but instead create concrete steps for moving forward to the European perspective. Furthermore, it intends to support the digitalisation of the region through gradual reduction of roaming charges and by increasing the possibilities for broadband internet access. ■

FUTURE OF EUROPE

Following the motto “united we stand strong”, the Bulgarian Presidency wants to promote social cohesion and economic growth. One of the main elements will be to start an active and constructive debate on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MMF) for the post-2020 period. It seeks to find a balance between new funds, e.g. a reserve fund for unexpected events, and those that already exist. The Presidency will moreover emphasise future cohesion in the EU to prevent a

greater disparity between different member states, e.g. by putting emphasis on the role of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and its simplification and modernisation. Other elements contain the discussion about the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), the Capital Markets Union as well the Banking Union, including a proposal for the creation of a European Deposit Guarantee Scheme. ■

DIGITAL ECONOMY


To maintain its citizens' wealth and prosperity, the EU must digitalise its economy and become one of the leading forces of digitalisation. Here, the Bulgarian Presidency identifies among others electronic communications, cross-border services, copyrights, e-privacy and cyber security as important issues. Moreover, Bulgaria highlights that education and digital skills are essential for ensuring Europe's future success. Focus of the agenda will be put on young people, including the promotion of early childhood development, the modernisation of educational systems and curricula as well as formal and informal learning as tools for strengthening social inclusion. Information and communication technologies shall be introduced at all levels of the educational system. ■

SECURITY AND STABILITY

Past terrorist acts and the migration crisis have shattered the believe of many European citizens that the EU can provide security and stability. Therefore, the Bulgarian Presidency stresses its goal to achieve a more efficient management of migration processes as well as to work to restore the normal functioning of the Schengen area. It is committed to work towards long lasting and fair solutions, efficient policies for repatriation and readmission as well as for a balanced approach between short and long-term measures aiming at addressing the source of migration. It wants to shift the focus from consequences to prevention. In terms of security, the Presidency will concentrate its efforts on strengthening border controls, exchange of information between the various bodies and terror prevention. Bulgaria underlines the special importance of this subject among its priorities. ■



WHO IS WHO

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INFORMATION,
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GERB = Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria

United Patriots (UP) = The nationalist alliance is constituted by three political parties: the Bulgarian National Movement (IMRO), the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB) and Attack

GERB

GERB

UP

BOYKO
BORISSOV
Prime Minister

UP

TOMISLAV
DONCHEV
*Deputy Prime Minister for EU
Funds and Economic Policies*

GERB

KRASIMIR
KARAKACHANOV
*Deputy Prime Minister for
Public Order and Security,
Minister of Defence*

GERB

VALERI
SIMEONOV
*Deputy Prime Minister for
Economic and Demographic
Policy*

EKATERINA
ZAHARIEVA
*Deputy Prime Minister for
Judicial Reform and Minister of
Foreign Affairs, nominated by
GERB, unaffiliated*

VLADISLAV
GORANOV
Minister of Finance



>> WHO IS WHO

GERB

VALENTIN
RADEV
Minister of Interior

GERB

NIKOLAY
NANKOV
*Minister of Regional
Development and
Public Works*

UP

BISER
PETKOV
*Minister of Labour and
Social Policies, nominated
by the United Patriots*

GERB

TSETSKA
TSACHEVA
Minister of Justice

GERB

KRASIMIR
VALCHEV
*Minister of Education and
Science, nominated by GERB*

GERB

KIRIL
ANANIEV
*Minister of Health,
nominated
by GERB, unaffiliated*

GERB

LILYANA
PAVLOVA
*Minister for the Bulgarian
Presidency of the
EU Council 2018*

UP

BOIL
BANOV
*Minister of Culture,
nominated by the
United Patriots*

UP

NENO
DIMOV
*Minister of Environment
and Water, nominated
by the United Patriots*



>> WHO IS WHO

UP

GERB

UP

RUMEN
PORODZANOV
*Minister of Agriculture,
Food and Forestry, nominated
by the United Patriots*

GERB

IVAYLO
MOSKOVSKI
*Minister of Transport,
Information Technology
and Communications*

GERB

EMIL
KARANIKOLOV
*Minister of Economy,
nominated by the
United Patriots*

GERB

TEMENUZHKA
PETKOVA
*Minister of Energy,
nominated by GERB,
unaffiliated*

NIKOLINA
ANGELKOVA
Minister of Tourism

KRASEN
KRALEV
*Minister of Youth
and Sports*



POLICY FIELDS

GENERAL AFFAIRS

The Bulgarian Presidency wants to advance the discussion about the future of Europe with a special focus on supporting the Western Balkans in moving towards the EU e.g. by encouraging necessary reforms. The next Multiannual Financial Framework will be a key issue, its main topics shall be discussed during a conference in March 2018. In order to promote the democratic legitimacy of the EU, Bulgaria will work on the adoption of revised regulations on political parties, the European Citizen's Initiative and the conclusion of the Transparency Register. Regarding Brexit negotiations, safeguarding the unity of the remaining 27 member states is considered a crucial priority. ■

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Bulgarian Presidency will focus on implementing the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, deepening EU-NATO cooperation and developing a Permanent Structured Cooperation. Apart from strengthening the European neighbourhood, especially the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership, Bulgaria wants to enhance transatlantic relations, continue the dialogue with Turkey and the efforts for resolving conflicts in Syria, Libya and the Middle East. Visibility of the Danube and Black Sea region shall be increased. With regard to trade,

the Presidency is committed to forward work on anti-dumping measures, foreign direct investment and access to public procurement. ■

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

The Bulgarian Presidency considers the establishment of a Financial Union crucial for finalising the Economic and Monetary Union. Focus will be set on risk reduction in the banking sector, the establishment of a European Deposit Guarantee Scheme and development of the Capital Market Union. Furthermore, taxation of the digital economy will be a key issue, with Bulgaria focusing on the Directive on a common corporate tax base and automatic exchange of information. The Presidency wants to forward the introduction of a definitive Value Added Tax (VAT) system and improve administrative cooperation in fighting VAT fraud. ■

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

For improving the security of EU citizens, the Bulgarian Presidency wants to strengthen border controls, efficiently manage migration processes and reform the European Asylum System as well as the Schengen Information System. Further, a new architecture for information exchange shall ensure

interoperability of IT-systems and databases. The Presidency will further promote the institutionalisation of the European Public Prosecutor's Office, contribute to the new EU e-Justice Strategy, to the upcoming e-Evidence Proposal as well as to a proposal fighting fraud and counterfeiting of non-cash means of payment. ■

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY, HEALTHCARE

With regard to the future of work, the Bulgarian Presidency wants to contribute to the discussion about developing practical knowledge and skills for the new jobs, the organisation of work and job security in the digital age. The Presidency is committed to make progress regarding the Posting of Workers Directive, the European Accessibility Act and a better coordination of social security systems. Other priorities include the social economy, gender equality and the work-life balance of parents and carers. Moreover, Bulgaria wants to promote a healthy diet for children and address the topic of availability of affordable and effective medicinal products. ■



>> POLICY FIELDS

TRANSPORT AND ENERGY

The Bulgarian Presidency assigns great importance to mobility as a connecting element between EU member states and its neighbours. The mobility package, access to the international road haulage market, rules for posting drivers as well as connecting infrastructure will be key issues. Bulgaria is committed to forward discussions about dossiers related to the "Clean Energy for all Europeans"-package while taking particularities of national energy sectors into account. The construction of the "Balkan European Gas Hub" and gas interconnections shall be forwarded inter alia at a second Investors Round Table and a high-level meeting on gas connectivity.

AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

The Bulgarian Presidency will focus on the modernisation and simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy and agriculture budget in the next Multiannual Financial Framework. The Presidency highlights the importance of tackling unfair trading practices and intends to closely monitor the market situation of sensitive agricultural sectors. Animal welfare will be a key topic, especially during transport, as well as the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement and CO₂-reduction, e.g.

in the automotive sector. Bulgaria is committed to further promote circular economy initiatives, especially the strategy on plastics, and the adoption of the waste legislative package. ■

COMPETITIVENESS AND DIGITAL SINGLE MARKET

In order to ensure sustainable economic growth in the EU, the Bulgarian Presidency will focus on a strategy for a Common Industrial Policy. The Presidency considers the Digital Single Market a source of competitiveness and wants to further forward the discussion about copyrights, cyber security, the protection of privacy, personal data and confidentiality of messages. Furthermore, Bulgaria supports the Commission's goal to issue a company law package and will further work on the services package as well as the introduction of a Single Digital Portal. It will organise a digital assembly and favours more competences for competition authorities. ■

EDUCATION, YOUTH AND CULTURE

The Bulgarian Presidency is committed to the preparation of the next generation of the Erasmus+ programme. Social inclusion and shared values shall be promoted via education and training. Digital education, digital skills and digital literacy shall be discussed during a conference in April 2018 and a joint action plan developed in cooperation with all stakeholders. The legal framework for the European Solidarity Corps shall be finalised, a Work Plan for Culture developed, and the importance of cultural heritage and international cultural relations respected. Moreover, an agreement on the Audio-Visual Media Services Directive shall be found. ■



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