



# Bulgaria

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# Chapter 1 | Geography



The Belogradchik Rocks of the Balkan Mountains.  
Wikimedia / Iliana Teneva

## Introduction

The Republic of Bulgaria is situated along the eastern portion of the Balkan Peninsula in southeastern Europe. It covers an area of 110,879 sq km (42,811 sq mi) that is divided into 28 provinces (*oblasti*) and is home to a population of approximately 6.9 million people. Situated on the western edge of the Black Sea, Bulgaria shares borders with Romania to the north, Serbia and North Macedonia to the west, Greece to the south, and Turkey to the east. Its natural landscape is diverse, featuring lowlands, plains, plateaus, river valleys, basins, and many mountains.<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>

1 Bulgaria Travel, "Nature," n.d., <https://www.bulgariatravel.org/en/Article/Details/4077/Nature#map=6/42.750/25.380>

2 Central Intelligence Agency, "Bulgaria," *World Factbook*, 28 April 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html>

3 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria" *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

# Geographical and Divisions

## Topography

Bulgaria's topography is characterized by high and low terrains generally alternating from east to west across the country. From the north, the Danubian Plain rises into the Balkan Mountains, also known as Stara Planina. Farther to the south is the Thracian Lowlands, from which arise the Rhodopes Mountains. The country's mean elevation is 472 m (1,549 ft).<sup>4, 5, 6</sup>

## Northern Bulgaria

The northern part of Bulgaria is divided into 14 provinces and consists mainly of plains and plateaus.<sup>7</sup> This region covers 48,596 sq km (18,763 sq mi) and is bordered by the Balkan Mountains to the south, the Danube River to the north, the Timok River to the west, and the Black Sea to the east.<sup>8, 9</sup>

The Danubian Plain composes the majority of Northern Bulgaria, which holds historical significance for Europe. Throughout the centuries, the steep terrain on the Bulgarian side of the Danube acted as an effective buffer against invasions from the north. The fortresses erected in Ruse and Silistra stand as testaments of the river's significance.<sup>10, 11, 12</sup>

## Balkan Mountains

Rising near the Timok River, the Balkan Mountains run through the center of the country for 557 km (346 mi) from east to west before abruptly ending at the Black Sea. The mountain range separates the northern region from the southern part of the country. These naturally diverse mountains hold a significant place in Bulgarian history, going back to the seventh century CE. Geographically, the mountains form a very effective natural barrier that was leveraged over the centuries by medieval capitals such as Pliska of the First Bulgarian Empire, which once stood in one of the range's fertile valleys. The ancient Roman province of Moesia also grew to prominence here, thanks in part to the secure geography of the region.<sup>13, 14</sup> Botev is the highest peak in the Balkan Mountains, rising to 2,376 m (7,795 ft).<sup>15, 16</sup> Bulgaria's capital, Sofia, lies in the Sofia Valley, which is the largest valley in the southern arm of the Balkan Mountains.<sup>17</sup>

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- 4 Day Translations, "Bulgaria: Geography of Bulgaria: Important Geographical Information about Bulgaria," 17 April 2017, <https://www.daytranslations.com/blog/guide/bulgaria/2/>
  - 5 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria" *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>
  - 6 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>
  - 7 Map Universal, "Provinces of Bulgaria-Oblasts of Bulgaria," 27 November 2018, <https://mapuniversal.com/provinces-of-bulgaria-oblasts-of-bulgaria/>
  - 8 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria" *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>
  - 9 National Statistical Institute, "Population and Housing Census in the Republic of Bulgaria 2011," n.d., <https://www.nsi.bg/census2011/indexen.php>
  - 10 Jonathan Bousfield and Dan Richardson, *Bulgaria: The Rough Guide* (London: Rough Guides, 1999), 108–109.
  - 11 Agnes Sachsenroeder, *Cultureshock! A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette: Bulgaria*, (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Corp., 2008), 232.
  - 12 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria" *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>
  - 13 Jonathan Bousfield and Dan Richardson, *Bulgaria: The Rough Guide* (London: Rough Guides, 1999), 129.
  - 14 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Moesia," 29 March 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Moesia>
  - 15 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Balkan Mountains," 21 April 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Balkan-Mountains>
  - 16 Boiana-MG, "10 Curious Facts about the Balkan Mountains," 17 October 2017, <http://blog.boiana-mg.com/bulgaria/10-curious-facts-balkan-mountains/>
  - 17 Bulgaria Travel, "Nature," n.d., <https://www.bulgariatravel.org/en/Article/Details/4077/Nature#map=6/42.750/25.380>

## Southern Bulgaria

Southern Bulgaria covers 62,414 sq km (24,098 sq mi) and is also divided into 14 provinces.<sup>18</sup> The Thracian Lowlands and their surrounding area in the extreme south are known for their well-established wine production.<sup>19</sup> The highest Bulgarian mountains are located in the Rila and Pirin ranges, which run through these lowlands. The Rila Mountains feature 31 peaks with an altitude of over 2,600 m (6,562 ft) and the two highest peaks on the Balkan Peninsula. Mount Musala is the highest peak in the entire peninsula, with an elevation of 2,925 m (9,596 ft). The peak is the coldest place in Bulgaria and on the Balkan Peninsula. Mount Vihren, located in the northern part of Pirin, is the second-highest summit in Bulgaria and the third-highest of the Balkan Peninsula with an elevation of 2,914 m (9,560 ft).<sup>20, 21</sup> Pirin National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.<sup>22</sup>

The Rhodopes Mountains, located east of the Rila Mountains, feature 11 peaks with an elevation of over 2,000 m (6,562 ft). Traditional villages, caves, waterfalls, and rock formations attract many tourists to the area. Several glacial lakes, such as the Seven Rila Lakes, are prominent fixtures of the landscape. The city of Plovdiv is located in southern Bulgaria on the banks of the Maritsa River.<sup>23, 24, 25</sup>

## Black Sea Coast

Bulgaria's Black Sea coast, which stretches 350 km (217 mi), forms the country's eastern boundary. The coastline features sandy beaches, fishing villages, historical landmarks, and natural wonders.<sup>26, 27</sup> Popular destinations on the Black Sea coast include Irakli Beach, where travelers can partake in wilderness camping; Pomorie Lake, known for its salt extraction; and the Veleka River Estuary, revered for its natural beauty. The coast is also home to Varna and Burgas, Bulgaria's busiest commercial ports.<sup>28, 29, 30</sup>

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- 18 Map Universal, "Provinces of Bulgaria-Oblasts of Bulgaria," 27 November 2018, <https://mapuniversal.com/provinces-of-bulgaria-oblasts-of-bulgaria/>
- 19 Mike Desimone and Jeff Jenssen, "Thracian Lowlands, Bulgaria—Best Wine Destinations 2017," Wine Enthusiast, 5 January 2017, <https://www.winemag.com/2017/01/05/thracian-lowlands-bulgaria-best-wine-destinations-2017/>
- 20 Kenneth Kimutai too, "The Tallest Mountains in Bulgaria," World Atlas, 18 June 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/tallest-mountains-in-bulgaria.html>
- 21 Bulgaria Travel, "Nature," n.d., <https://www.bulgariatravel.org/en/Article/Details/4077/Nature#map=6/42.750/25.380>
- 22 UNESCO, "Pirin National Park," n.d., <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/225/>
- 23 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria" *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>
- 24 National Statistical Institute, "Population and Housing Census in the Republic of Bulgaria 2011," n.d., <https://www.nsi.bg/census2011/indexen.php>
- 25 Bulgaria Travel, "Nature," n.d., <https://www.bulgariatravel.org/en/Article/Details/4077/Nature#map=6/42.750/25.380>
- 26 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria" *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>
- 27 D. Bibishkov, "Black Sea Coast of Bulgaria," My Guide Bulgaria, 4 May 2017, <https://www.myguidebulgaria.com/regionalinfo/black-sea-coast-of-bulgaria>
- 28 Maria Angelova, "A Nature Lover's Guide to the Bulgarian Black Sea Coast," Culture Trip, 31 July 2018, <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/bulgaria/articles/a-nature-lovers-guide-to-the-bulgarian-black-sea-coast/>
- 29 Crazy Tourist, "15 Best Things to Do in Varna (Bulgaria)," n.d., <https://www.thecrazytourist.com/15-best-things-varna-bulgaria/>
- 30 Crazy Tourist, "15 Best Things to Do in Burgas (Bulgaria)," n.d., <https://www.thecrazytourist.com/15-best-things-burgas-bulgaria/>



## Climate

Bulgaria's climate is temperate-continental with distinct seasons. The average annual temperature varies based on region. In the north, temperatures average 8°C (46.4°F); in the south, they reach 11°C (51.8°F). Temperatures drop to 2.6°C (36.7°F) in the mountain regions and in the plains they average 12°C (53.6°F). Average annual rainfall reaches around 700 mm (27.5 in). The mountains average a little more, with 1,000 mm (39.4 in), while the coast experiences less with 4–600 mm (15.7–23.6 in). Rainfall is common year-round.<sup>31</sup> Frequent snowfall occurs between December and March, particularly in the mountainous regions. Spring runs from March to May, with light rainfall and the first warm days of the year. Summer is June to August when the heat is at its most intense in the lowlands. Autumn runs from September to November and features milder weather at first before cold winds move in and circulate across the country.<sup>32</sup>

## Bodies of Water

### Danube

The Danube is the second-longest river in Europe and forms the majority of Bulgaria's northern border with Romania. It begins in Germany and makes its way through 10 countries in all before emptying into the Black Sea. Bulgaria's portion of the Danube is considered very biodiverse in part because there are no dams or other manmade impediments along its stretch. The river also marks the beginning of the Danubian Plain, a tableland that stretches throughout northern Bulgaria. The Danube has several tributaries within Bulgaria: the Erma, Nishava, Ogosta, Iskür, Vit, Osam, Yantra, Rousenski Lo, and Danube Dobroudja rivers.<sup>33, 34, 35</sup>

### Maritsa

The Maritsa runs 480 km (298 mi), of which 309 km (192 mi) flows through Bulgaria. The river originates in the Rila Mountains and forms part of Bulgaria's border with Greece before emptying into the Aegean Sea. The river winds through Plovdiv, which is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world.<sup>36</sup> Farming for exports, along with a portion of the Sofia–Istanbul railway, are found within the river's valley.<sup>37, 38</sup>

### Struma

The Struma runs 415 km (258 mi) southwest of Sofia before emptying into the Aegean Sea. Its drainage basin, totaling 17,330 sq km (6,691 sq mi), originates in Bulgaria and reaches into Greece and North Macedonia.<sup>39, 40</sup> Approximately 290 km (180 mi) of the river runs through Bulgaria. The Struma's river valley is home to many vineyards, part of Bulgaria's bustling wine-producing region.<sup>41</sup>

31 Weather Online, "Bulgaria," n.d., <https://www.weatheronline.co.uk/reports/climate/Bulgaria.htm>

32 Climates to Travel, "Climate—Bulgaria," n.d., <https://www.climatestotravel.com/climate/bulgaria>

33 Victor Kiprof, "The Longest Rivers in Bulgaria," World Atlas, 2 July 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-longest-rivers-in-bulgaria.html>

34 ICPDR-IKSD, "Bulgaria: Danube Basin," n.d., <https://www.icpdr.org/main/danube-basin/bulgaria>

35 Peter Georgiev Pencev and Patricia Garland Pinka, "Danube River," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2 August 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Danube-River>

36 Associated Press, "Bulgaria's Oldest City Honored as European Capital of Culture for 2019," USA Today, 12 January 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/destinations/2019/01/12/plovdiv-bulgarias-oldest-city-honored-european-culture-capital/2558024002/>

37 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Maritsa River," 2 September 2011, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Maritsa-River>

38 Victor Kiprof, "The Longest Rivers in Bulgaria," World Atlas, 2 July 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-longest-rivers-in-bulgaria.html>

39 Victor Kiprof, "The Longest Rivers in Bulgaria," World Atlas, 2 July 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-longest-rivers-in-bulgaria.html>

40 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Struma River," 1 November 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Struma-River>

41 World Rider, "The Struma River Valley—Home to Bulgaria's Big Red Wines & So Much More," 15 July 2019, <https://www.worldrider.com/the-struma-river-valley-home-to-bulgarias-big-red-wines-so-much-more/>

## Tundzha

The Tundzha runs for approximately 365 km (227 mi) and is fed by 50 tributaries before becoming a tributary itself to the Maritsa. The upper and middle Tundzha river valleys are hotspots for archaeological and paleoenvironmental discovery.<sup>42, 43</sup>

## Iskür

The Iskür is the largest river that flows entirely within Bulgaria. It flows 368 km (229 mi) before meeting up with the Danube. It is the primary source of water for the Iskür Reservoir and its associated hydro stations. Its water is used for both domestic and industrial purposes.<sup>44, 45, 46</sup>

## Major Cities

City	Population
Sofia	1,281,000
Plovdiv	346,893
Varna	336,505
Burgas	202,434
Ruse	142,902

## Sofia

Sofia is the largest city in Bulgaria and its capital. It is situated in the Sofia Basin, a trough-like valley in western Bulgaria.<sup>47, 48</sup> The Thracian Serdi tribe first settled there in the eighth century BCE. The Roman and Ottoman Empires conquered it over the following centuries. In 1878, Russian troops liberated the city from Ottoman rule, at which point it was declared the capital of Bulgaria. After World War II, the city industrialized, becoming a hub for engineering, metallurgy, food production, and textile and clothing manufacturing. Its surrounding area is largely agricultural.<sup>49</sup> Sofia is also home to prominent museums, such as the National History Museum, the Sofia History Museum, and the National Gallery.<sup>50</sup>

42 Victor Kiprof, "The Longest Rivers in Bulgaria," World Atlas, 2 July 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-longest-rivers-in-bulgaria.html>

43 Brian Ballsun-Stanton and Adela Sobotkova, "Introduction," Tundzha Archaeological Project, 27 November 2018, <https://www.tundzha.org/>

44 Panacomp Wonderland Travel, "Iskar River," n.d., <http://www.panacomp.net/iskar-river/>

45 Victor Kiprof, "The Longest Rivers in Bulgaria," World Atlas, 2 July 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-longest-rivers-in-bulgaria.html>

46 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Iskür River," 28 July 2011, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Iskur-River>

47 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Sofia," 13 November 2019 <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sofia>

48 Amber Pariona, "What Are the Biggest Cities in Bulgaria?" World Atlas, 18 June 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-biggest-cities-in-bulgaria.html>

49 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Sofia," 13 November 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sofia>

50 Maria Angelova, "8 Reasons You Should Visit Sofia at Least Once in Your Lifetime," 4 May 2017, <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/bulgaria/articles/8-reasons-you-should-visit-sofia-at-least-once-in-your-lifetime/>

## Plovdiv

Plovdiv is the country's second-largest city and the oldest continuously inhabited city in Europe. The city has a long history, tracing back to 6000 BCE when ancient settlements sprang up in the area. In 342 BCE, Philip II of Macedon founded Philippopolis, which eventually evolved into Plovdiv.<sup>51</sup> The city features ancient architecture and ruins such as a Roman stadium, and the Ancient Theater, a Roman structure that still hosts events today. The city has a lively arts scene and holds several cultural festivals, unofficially earning the title of the cultural heart of Bulgaria. There are more than 20 wineries within the city and its surroundings.<sup>52</sup> The main economic enterprises are tobacco production, food processing, textiles, and brewing. The city is bisected by the Maritsa River and is home to several colleges and universities.<sup>53</sup>

## Varna

Varna is Bulgaria's third-largest city, located along the Black Sea coast and known as "Bulgaria's Sea Capital." The port of Varna is the largest seaport in the country and home of the Bulgarian navy. The city is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Europe; it attracts visitors to its large seaside resort and to Varna's Museum of Archaeology, which hosts the world's oldest gold jewelry, dating back to the Middle Eneolithic Age (4500–4000 BCE).<sup>54, 55, 56, 57</sup>

## Burgas

Burgas is one of two major port cities on the Black Sea, the fourth-largest city in Bulgaria, and the administrative center for its region. The city's growth is closely related to the growth of Bulgaria's railroad system, which allowed for expansion and innovation in the fishing town around the turn of the 20th century.<sup>58, 59</sup> The largest oil refinery in southeastern Europe and the main contributor to the city's economy is the Neftochim Burgas oil refinery. The city attracts many visitors to its museums, archaeological ruins, churches, and monasteries.<sup>60</sup>

## Ruse

Ruse was founded in the first century CE as a Roman fort and harbor on the Danube. The Ottomans used it as a strategically important military base and part of the empire's first railway in 1866. The city passed into Bulgarian control in 1877. Today, Ruse is a prominent river port and transportation center for road and rail shipping. Its industrial facilities include an oil refinery, train assembly plant, agricultural assembly plant, and textile mills. The city boasts elegant 19th-century architecture, an opera house, a symphony orchestra, and an agricultural institute.<sup>61, 62</sup>

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- 51 Plovdiv, "History of Plovdiv," n.d., <http://www.plovdivguide.com/History-of-Plovdiv>
- 52 Bulgaria Wine Tours, "Inside Plovdiv: Travel Tips and Tales," n.d., <https://bulgariawinetours.com/inside-plovdiv-travel-tips-and-tales/>
- 53 Amber Pariona, "What Are the Biggest Cities in Bulgaria?" World Atlas, 18 June 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-biggest-cities-in-bulgaria.html>
- 54 Guide Bulgaria, "Town Varna," n.d., <http://www.guide-bulgaria.com/NE/Varna/Varna/Varna>
- 55 Best BG Properties, "Information about the City of Varna, the Sea Capital of Bulgaria," n.d., [https://www.bestbgproperties.com/bulgarian-districts/Varna\\_property.html](https://www.bestbgproperties.com/bulgarian-districts/Varna_property.html)
- 56 Amber Pariona, "What Are the Biggest Cities in Bulgaria?" World Atlas, 18 June 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-biggest-cities-in-bulgaria.html>
- 57 Varna Museum of Archaeology, "Prehistory—The Earliest Traces of Human Presence," n.d., [https://www.archaeo.museumvarna.com/en/category/list?category\\_id=3&id=6](https://www.archaeo.museumvarna.com/en/category/list?category_id=3&id=6)
- 58 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Burgas," 11 November 2011, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Burgas>
- 59 Guide Bulgaria, "Town Bourgas," n.d., <http://www.guide-bulgaria.com/se/bourgas/bourgas/bourgas>
- 60 Amber Pariona, "What Are the Biggest Cities in Bulgaria?" World Atlas, 18 June 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-biggest-cities-in-bulgaria.html>
- 61 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Ruse," 21 May 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ruse>
- 62 Lonely Planet, "Ruse," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/bulgaria/central-balkans/ruse>

## Environmental Concerns

Bulgaria has some of the highest concentrations of air pollution among EU countries, leading to approximately 13,000 premature deaths per year. Since 2007, Sofia has repeatedly been named the European Union’s most polluted capital. In 2015 the European Commission referred Bulgaria to the EU Court of Justice for not meeting its obligation to provide clean air to its citizens. Other high-pollution cities are Pernik, Burgas, Plovdiv, and Ruse.<sup>63, 64, 65</sup>

Water pollution is a major problem for Bulgaria’s rivers. The Danube is plagued by pollution from heavy metals, pharmaceutical substances, and pesticides. Agricultural fertilizers dumped into the river cause oxygen depletion. One study concluded that there are more plastic particles than fish larvae in the river. Pollution, along with illegal fishing and dams, has led to the near-extinction of the sturgeon, a critical part of the river’s ecosystems. Overall, the fish population in the Danube and its tributaries has diminished by 60% since 1999.<sup>66, 67, 68, 69</sup>

The Danube is one of many contributors to pollution in the Black Sea. Like in the river, nitrogen and phosphorus from agriculture, industry, and domestic use create an environment starved of oxygen. Other pollutants are oil from shipping vessels or wastewater, heavy metals from industry, and ash from the burning of coal. The sea is experiencing an ongoing collapse of marine life, with species like sturgeon, monk seal, and anchovies on the brink of disappearance. Waters at several of Bulgaria’s Black Sea beaches are contaminated from pollution.<sup>70, 71, 72</sup>

Bulgaria’s soil is contaminated by heavy metal pollution from industrial plants and smelting and mining operations. Contamination affects the immediate vicinity of mining and smelting sites and also has the potential to spread beyond the local area. Contamination has been found at mining and smelting sites that have been dormant for as long as centuries. The detrimental effects of heavy metal soil pollution include the increased vulnerability of forests and the toxic contamination of the food chain, a danger for humans.<sup>73, 74</sup>

63 Ugo Taddei, “Bulgarians Denied a Say on Air Pollution,” Euractiv, 8 February 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/air-pollution/opinion/bulgarians-denied-a-say-on-air-pollution/>

64 European Commission, “Commission Refers Belgium and Bulgaria to Court And Gives Sweden a Final Warning over Poor Air Quality,” 18 June 2015, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_15\\_5197](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_15_5197)

65 Francesco Martino, “Sofia, Capital of Pollution,” Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa, 15 January 2019, <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Bulgaria/Sofia-capital-of-pollution-192015>

66 Novinite.com, “WWF: All Rivers in Bulgaria Are Damaged,” 14 February 2019, <https://www.novinite.com/articles/195193/WWF%3A+All+Rivers+in+Bulgaria+are+Damaged>

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70 Black Sea Scene, “Major Problem Areas,” n.d., [http://www.blackseascene.net/content/content.asp?menu=0040034\\_000000](http://www.blackseascene.net/content/content.asp?menu=0040034_000000)

71 Peter Schwartzstein, “The Black Sea Is Dying, and War Might Push it Over the Edge,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, 11 May 2016, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/black-sea-dying-and-war-might-push-it-over-edge-180959053/>

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## Natural Hazards

Winter often brings severe weather to Eastern Europe. In Bulgaria, harsh snowstorms, torrential rain, and freezing temperatures cause power outages, flooding, school closures, and traffic and railway disruptions.<sup>75, 76, 77</sup> In 2015, heavy snow and rain caused over 1,800 landslides throughout the country.<sup>78</sup>

The Balkan Peninsula is seismically active due to its location near tectonic plate boundaries. In Bulgaria, as in other Balkan countries, vulnerability to earthquakes is heightened by the poor building practices and cost-cutting of the communist era and its immediate aftermath. In August 1986, a 6.9 magnitude earthquake struck Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia. Since Bulgaria joined the European Union in 2007, construction is required to comply with earthquake safety standards.<sup>79, 80, 81</sup>

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- 75 Novinite.com, “Code Yellow Warning for Dangerous Weather in All Bulgarian Regions,” 5 February 2020, <https://www.novinite.com/articles/203042/Code+Yellow+Warning+for+Dangerous+Weather+in+All+Bulgarian+Regions>
- 76 Associated Press, “Snow, Freezing Weather Causes Disruptions in Bulgaria, Romania. Power Out, Roads Blocked,” Fox News, 20 November 2014, <https://www.foxnews.com/world/snow-freezing-weather-causes-disruptions-in-bulgaria-romania-power-out-roads-blocked>
- 77 Sofia Globe, “Bulgaria’s Icy Weather Causes School Closures, Traffic Disruptions, Railway Delays,” 8 January 2017, <https://sofiaglobe.com/2017/01/08/bulgarias-icy-weather-causes-school-closures-traffic-disruptions-railway-delays/>
- 78 Sofia Globe, “More than 1,800 Landslides in Bulgaria,” 17 March 2015, <https://sofiaglobe.com/2015/03/17/more-than-1800-landslides-in-bulgaria/>
- 79 Marc Santora et al., “The Lesson of an Albanian Earthquake: The Balkans Aren’t Ready for the Big One,” *New York Times*, 3 January 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/01/world/europe/earthquake-albania-balkans.html>
- 80 *New York Times*, “Strong Earthquake Hits 3 East European Nations,” 31 August 1986, <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/08/31/world/strong-earthquake-hits-3-east-european-nations.html>
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# Bulgaria in Perspective

## Chapter 1 | Geography, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. Bulgaria's territory is situated on the Balkan Steppe, a vast grassland that dominates the Balkan Peninsula.  True  False
2. The Danube River forms the majority of Bulgaria's border with Romania.  True  False
3. The Bulgarian city of Plovdiv is the oldest continuously inhabited city in Europe.  True  False
4. Bulgaria innovated an eco-conscious method for mining that has significantly reduced and contained the spread of soil contamination.  True  False
5. Bulgaria's geographical location and proactive environmental policies have made it one of the least polluted countries in Europe.  True  False

# Bulgaria in Perspective

## Chapter 1 | Geography, Assessment Answers

1. False:  
Bulgaria's topography is characterized by high and low terrains generally alternating from east to west, including the Danubian Plain, the Balkan Mountains, the Thracian Lowlands, and the Rhodopes Mountains.
2. True:  
The Danube begins in Germany and makes its way through 10 countries before emptying into the Black Sea. In Bulgaria, the river borders Romania and marks the beginning of the Danubian Plain, a tableland that stretches throughout the northern region.
3. True:  
The city dates back to 6000 BCE when ancient settlements were established in the area.
4. False:  
Contamination affects the immediate surroundings of mining and smelting sites and can remain in the soil for centuries. It also has the potential to spread beyond its vicinity.
5. False:  
Bulgaria has some of the highest concentrations of air pollution among EU countries. In 2015 the European Commission referred Bulgaria to the EU Court of Justice for not meeting its obligation to provide clean air to its citizens.

## Chapter 2 | History



The Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia.  
Flickr / Naval S

### Introduction

Bulgaria's national identity goes back over 13 centuries to when Bulgars and Slavs established a state in the Balkan Peninsula and began to rival mighty Byzantium. This First Bulgarian Empire established Christianity as a pillar of the Bulgarian national psyche. After a Second Bulgarian Empire flourished in the 13th century, the Ottoman Turks conquered the Balkans and subjugated the Bulgarians for nearly five centuries. With Russian help, Bulgarians won hard-fought freedom from the Turks in 1878, and Bulgaria joined the ranks of European nation-states, playing its part in the balance of power and jostling for territory. World War I took an excessive toll on the small country, and the conclusion of World War II saw the establishment of nearly five decades of authoritarian communist rule. After a difficult post-communist transition, Bulgaria claimed its place in 21st century Europe even as corruption and political and economic instability persisted.<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>

1 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

2 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

3 BBC News, "Bulgaria Profile—Timeline," 22 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17205431>



# Early History and Empire

## *Thracians and Greeks*

Evidence of human civilization in Bulgaria dates back to the fifth millennium BCE when prehistoric settlements existed in the northeastern part of the country.<sup>4</sup> In the Bronze Age, Thracian tribes settled in the area, reaching their peak dominance in the sixth century BCE. Thracians were a warrior aristocracy, considered one of the original peoples of the Balkans. Although the Thracians were eventually eradicated by expulsion or assimilated over time, their influence on the region is still seen in ruins, monuments, and the cultural significance of horses. Alexander the Great expanded his empire into the region, founding several settlements in the east and northeast in the fourth century BCE. However, the Greeks were unable to push further inland due to conflicts with the Thracians, who still dominated the territory. Greek culture maintained its presence in the region for hundreds of years, and the Bulgarian language still retains some Greek words as a testament to their influence.<sup>5, 6, 7, 8</sup>

## *Roman Rule*

The Romans entered Bulgaria in the first century CE when they seized control of Greek ports and settlements. Romans divided the territory into two provinces: Moesia in the north and Thrace in the south.<sup>9</sup> Thracians eventually became full-fledged citizens during Roman rule. The Roman period was marked by rapid development. Roads, towns, and military and civilian infrastructure emerged in quick succession; some of the roads the Romans established are still in use today.<sup>10</sup> Sofia (known then as Ulpia Serdica) was declared the capital of the Roman province Dacia, which extended north of the Danube. A series of clashes in the third century with local tribes and groups such as Goths, Visigoths, and the Huns contributed to the Roman decline in the region.<sup>11, 12</sup>

## *Slavs, Bulgars, and the First Bulgarian Empire*

Slavic people arrived on the Balkan Peninsula in the sixth and seventh centuries and established communities centered on agriculture and animal herding. The seventh century saw the Bulgars move into the area and was marked by warfare and the assimilation of the Bulgars with the Slav people. Byzantine emperor Constantine IV attempted to subdue the Bulgars and Slavs but suffered military defeat at the hands of Khan Asparukh. In 681 CE, Byzantium recognized Bulgar control of the area between the Danube and the Balkan Mountains, marking the historical beginning of the Bulgarian state<sup>13, 14, 15</sup>

Asparukh's successors established a court at Pliska in northeastern Bulgaria and ruled what came to be called the First Bulgarian Empire. Peace was elusive, however, and conflicts with Byzantium marked much of the empire's early years. In the early ninth century, Khan Krum stabilized the empire and strengthened the foundation of the

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4 BBC News, "Europe's 'Oldest Prehistoric Town' Unearthed in Bulgaria," 31 October 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-20156681>

5 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

6 Jonathan Bousfield and Dan Richardson, *Bulgaria: The Rough Guide* (London: Rough Guides, 1999), 287.

7 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

8 Lonely Planet, "Bulgaria: History," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/bulgaria/history>

9 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

10 Bojidar Dimitrov, *Bulgaria: Illustrated History* (Sofia: Borina, 2002), <https://www.bulgaria-embassy.org/en/history-and-symbols/>

11 Jonathan Bousfield and Dan Richardson, *Bulgaria: The Rough Guide* (London: Rough Guides, 1999), 288.

12 Lonely Planet, "Bulgaria: History," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/bulgaria/history#233579>

13 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

14 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

15 BBC News, "Bulgaria Profile—Timeline," 22 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17205431>

state by abolishing the tribal structure and appointing governors to different regions. The empire's reach grew into Macedonia and parts of present-day Serbia and Croatia.<sup>16, 17, 18, 19</sup>

### ***The Spread of Christianity***

In 865, Khan Boris made Christianity the state religion.<sup>20, 21</sup> The spread of Christianity was facilitated by followers of Cyril and Methodius, Christian scholars who created an alphabet for the Slavic language. For the still disparate Bulgars and Slavs, Christianity acted as a unifying force that allowed them to become the Bulgarian people.<sup>22, 23, 24</sup>

By the end of the ninth century, Christianity was firmly established under Simeon I. Simeon's rule marked the apogee of the First Bulgarian Empire—his capital Preslav rivaled Constantinople in cultural and commercial achievements. Simeon was a gifted military leader, but his ultimately unsuccessful campaigns to enlarge the empire initiated a period of decline. By 1018, Bulgaria was incorporated into the Byzantine Empire.<sup>25, 26, 27</sup>

### ***The Second Bulgarian Empire***

In 1185, a successful revolt against Constantinople by brothers Ivan and Peter Asen achieved independence and the establishment of the Second Bulgarian Empire with its capital at Turnovo. Under the reign of Ivan Asen II in the first half of the 13th century, Bulgarian rule again dominated the Balkans, extending from the Black Sea to the Adriatic. Political decline followed, however, precipitated internally by peasant revolts and externally by unrelenting Mongol raids and clashes with the Byzantines, Serbs, and Magyars.<sup>28, 29, 30</sup>

## **Ottoman Rule**

The weakened vestiges of the Second Bulgarian Empire were toppled in 1396 when the Ottoman Turks invaded and conquered the Balkans.<sup>31</sup> The era of Turkish rule dubbed the “Turkish yoke” to evoke imagery of imprisonment and slavery, was oppressive for Bulgarians. It is estimated that as much as half of the population was killed or forced into slavery. The empire was infamous for its “blood tax,” the forcible collection of male children from conquered peoples for conversion to Islam and permanent service in the Ottoman army. In response to Turkish brutality and in defiance of local authorities, many Bulgarians became haiduks (outlaws).<sup>32, 33</sup>

Despite the despotism and cultural suppression, centralized Ottoman rule brought a measure of peace and stability to the Balkans. The Bulgarian population was able to maintain its Orthodox Christian faith, albeit under

16 Lonely Planet, “Bulgaria: History,” n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/bulgaria/history>

17 John D. Bell et al., “Bulgaria,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

18 Veneta Pavlova, “Khan Krum—Victorious Ruler and Lawmaker,” 17 April 2014, <https://bnr.bg/en/post/100398780/khan-krum-victorious-ruler-and-lawmaker>

19 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Krum,” 9 April 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Krum>

20 Lonely Planet, “Bulgaria: History,” n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/bulgaria/history>

21 Jonathan Bousfield and Dan Richardson, *Bulgaria: The Rough Guide* (London: Rough Guides, 1999), 289.

22 John D. Bell et al., “Bulgaria,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

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24 BBC News, “Bulgaria Profile—Timeline,” 22 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17205431>

25 John D. Bell et al., “Bulgaria,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

26 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

27 BBC News, “Bulgaria Profile—Timeline,” 22 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17205431>

28 John D. Bell et al., “Bulgaria,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

29 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

30 BBC News, “Bulgaria Profile—Timeline,” 22 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17205431>

31 Lonely Planet, “Bulgaria: History,” n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/bulgaria/history>

32 Jonathan Bousfield and Dan Richardson, *Bulgaria: The Rough Guide* (London: Rough Guides, 1999), 292.

33 John D. Bell et al., “Bulgaria,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

Greek ecclesiastical authority. Bulgarian lands were made into fiefs administered by military or political officials. The locals paid taxes but largely retained control over their affairs and customs. Some artisans and merchants prospered under the new system. Cities became increasingly cosmopolitan, and the Bulgarian culture, language, and traditions survived primarily in small villages.<sup>34, 35</sup>

Starting in the 17th century, the Ottoman Empire began a decline as it was battered by Christian Europe and beset by corruption. As its central power weakened, local officials started to exploit their subjects through exorbitant taxation and other demands more ruthlessly. The Bulgarian peasants responded with a series of revolts in the 1590s, 1680s, and 1730s, all of which were brutally suppressed. Bulgarian national consciousness was rekindled through the promotion of Bulgarian thought and writings by the Orthodox church, the growth of commerce, and the spread of education and Enlightenment ideas. Russia, long a rival of the Ottomans, supported the freedom struggles of Bulgarians and other Slavic Christians.<sup>36, 37</sup>

By the mid-19th century, Bulgarian revolutionary movements began organizing abroad in Serbia and Romania. Figures like Georgi Rakovski, Lyuben Karavelov, and Vasil Levski laid the theoretical and practical groundwork for a national uprising that would overthrow the Turks and establish an independent Bulgaria. After Istanbul bloodily suppressed an uprising in 1876 and refused to implement reforms, Russia declared war on the Ottomans in 1877. Bulgarians enthusiastically joined the effort and helped soundly defeat the Turks by 1878. The oppressive yoke was at long last removed.<sup>38, 39, 40</sup>

## Autonomy and Independence

After the Russo-Turkish War, the Russia-driven Treaty of San Stefano provided for an expansive, independent Bulgaria. Britain and Austria-Hungary, fearing the destabilizing effect of inordinate Russian influence in the Balkans, steered toward a revised settlement that split Bulgaria in half and reduced its borders. The north was established as the autonomous principality of Bulgaria, still nominally under Ottoman sovereignty. The south became the autonomous Ottoman province of Eastern Rumelia, with a Christian governor. Macedonia reverted fully to Turkey.<sup>41, 42, 43</sup>

Newly liberated Bulgaria embarked on a path of modernization, industrialization, and political vibrancy. The young country forged close ties with Western Europe, reformed its legal system based on European models, and established a strong education system that nearly eliminated illiteracy. In the countryside, the former Ottoman landholdings gave way to one of Europe's most equitable schemes of land redistribution to smallholders. The adoption of modern agricultural technologies increased crop yields. Industrialization proceeded rapidly, with a major expansion of factories and railroads. The new constitution established a unicameral parliamentary system,

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34 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>  
35 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

36 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>  
37 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

38 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>  
39 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

40 BBC News, "Bulgaria Profile—Timeline," 22 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17205431>

41 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

42 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

43 BBC News, "Bulgaria Profile—Timeline," 22 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17205431>

and political parties emerged, which fell into three main factions—liberal, conservative, and Russophile. Social-democratic, communist, and agrarian parties also formed, in response to harsh industrial working conditions and increased agricultural taxes.<sup>44, 45, 46</sup>

The principality's first prince, Alexander I, presided over an 1885 union with Eastern Rumelia and led the Bulgarian army to victory in a conflict with Serbia that same year. Alexander's internal scheming and autocratic tendencies led to his overthrow in 1886. Starting in 1887, liberal prime minister Stefan Stambolov led a strong government that stabilized Bulgaria's turbulent politics, albeit with an iron hand. After Stambolov's dismissal in 1894 and assassination the following year, Prince Ferdinand, Alexander's replacement, became the country's dominant political figure. In 1908, Ferdinand seized upon Ottoman instability to declare himself tsar of a fully independent and united Bulgaria.<sup>47, 48, 49, 50</sup>

Externally, the young country found itself in the middle of ever-shifting power struggles between Russia, the Ottomans, and other European powers like Britain and Austria-Hungary. Regionally, Bulgaria also had to contend with the interests of neighbors like Serbia and Romania and with the fraught issue of supporting rebels in Ottoman-held Macedonia. In 1912, Bulgaria allied with Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro and conquered Macedonia and other Ottoman territories. The allies could not agree on how to divide the conquered lands, however, triggering a second conflict in 1913, in which Serbia, Greece, Romania, and Turkey subdued Bulgaria. By the end of the First and Second Balkan Wars, Bulgaria gained only small parts of Macedonia and other former Ottoman lands. At the same time, it lost some of its northern territory to Romania.<sup>51, 52, 53</sup>

## The Two World Wars

Bulgaria entered World War I in 1915 on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary after those powers promised considerable territorial gains. After initial successes, Bulgarian troops became bogged down and demoralized. At home, severe economic shortages led to riots and political upheaval. By 1918 the tide of the war had turned, and Allied forces marched into Bulgaria. Having lost control of power, Tsar Alexander abdicated in favor of his son Boris. The Bulgarian army suffered the highest per capita losses of any combatant country in the war. Since Bulgaria was on the losing side, postwar settlements awarded Bulgarian territory to Yugoslavia and Romania and forced Bulgaria to disarm.<sup>54, 55, 56</sup>

In the 1919 elections, charismatic agrarian party leader Aleksandŭr Stamboliyski was swept to power on a wave of popular discontent. Stamboliyski implemented ambitious policies like a progressive income tax, land reform,

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44 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

45 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

46 BBC News, "Bulgaria Profile—Timeline," 22 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17205431>

47 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

48 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

49 BBC News, "Bulgaria Profile—Timeline," 22 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17205431>

50 Jonathan Bousfield and Dan Richardson, *Bulgaria: The Rough Guide* (London: Rough Guides, 1999), 295.

51 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

52 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

53 BBC News, "Bulgaria Profile—Timeline," 22 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17205431>

54 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

55 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

56 BBC News, "Bulgaria Profile—Timeline," 22 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17205431>

cooperative agriculture and industry, and expansion of education. His popularity and ruthlessness led to his deposition and murder in a right-wing coup in 1923. Subsequent years were marked by terrorist campaigns carried out by outlawed communists and Macedonian extremists. To the backdrop of the Great Depression and political upheaval, a fascist group called Zveno seized power in a coup in 1934. Zveno suspended the constitution and abolished political parties, but its ambitions were curtailed in 1935 when Tsar Boris III intervened and established a military-backed royal dictatorship.<sup>57, 58, 59</sup>

At the start of World War II in 1939, Bulgaria, though officially neutral, had close ties to Germany and Italy. Germany reinforced the friendship by having Romania cede the territory of Dobruja back to Bulgaria in 1940. In 1941, acting on perennial hopes of territorial expansion, Tsar Boris entered the war on the side of the Axis Powers and Bulgarian troops occupied parts of Greece and Yugoslavia. At home, a communist-led resistance movement that also included Zveno and other factions grew as the war progressed. In 1943, Tsar Boris unexpectedly died, and political indecision reigned as the Axis Powers were collapsing. In 1944, the Soviet Union invaded Bulgaria unopposed. In the settlement with the Soviets, Bulgaria returned the Greek and Yugoslavian lands it had occupied. The Soviet military presence helped the communists gain and consolidate power.<sup>60, 61, 62</sup>

## The Communist Era

The communists deposed Boris's young son and successor, Simeon II, and abolished the monarchy in 1946. After widespread political purges, the communists implemented a Soviet-style constitution and legal system, nationalized industry and agriculture, and imposed state control over the Orthodox church. Under the personality cult leadership of Vulko Chervenkov, the state stifled dissent through a strong security apparatus and the use of concentration camps, suppressed cultural and artistic expression, and distanced itself from countries outside the Soviet orbit, including neighboring Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey.<sup>63, 64, 65</sup>

The death of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in 1953 weakened Chervenkov's grip on power, and by the middle of the decade, Todor Zhivkov emerged as party leader. Zhivkov implemented mild reforms, including the rehabilitation of formerly purged party figures. His long rule saw the ramping up of heavy industry and a new emphasis on the production and import of consumer goods. Externally, he opened Bulgaria to the West, provided aid and assistance to Third World countries, and improved relations with Bulgaria's Balkan neighbors, particularly Greece. Bulgaria's implication in a 1981 plot to assassinate Pope John Paul II and a repressive campaign to assimilate the country's ethnic Turks in the mid-1980s tarnished the country's international image.<sup>66, 67, 68, 69</sup>

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57 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

58 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

59 BBC News, "Bulgaria Profile—Timeline," 22 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17205431>

60 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

61 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

62 BBC News, "Bulgaria Profile—Timeline," 22 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17205431>

63 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

64 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

65 BBC News, "Bulgaria Profile—Timeline," 22 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17205431>

66 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

67 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

68 BBC News, "Bulgaria Profile—Timeline," 22 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17205431>

69 Jonathan Bousfield and Dan Richardson, *Bulgaria: The Rough Guide*. London: Rough Guides, 1999, 298.

In the 1980s, economic mismanagement and Zhivkov's focus on reducing the country's debt led to shortages of consumer goods and discontent among Bulgarians. By the end of the decade, dissidents were emboldened and demanded democratization and openness. Zhivkov was removed by a coup in 1989 and later imprisoned for embezzlement. The communists dislodged themselves from state control and became the Bulgarian Socialist Party. In 1991 a new constitution declared Bulgaria a parliamentary republic, and elections narrowly brought an opposition coalition to power.<sup>70, 71, 72</sup>

## Post-communist Transition and Recent Events

As Bulgaria collectively sought to reconcile the lingering influences of communism in the 1990s, economic reforms were implemented to expedite privatization and restitution of property confiscated during communist rule. The political instability of the period led to economic chaos marked by bread lines, fuel shortages, and increased corruption. After an exceptionally high rate of governmental turnover among center-right and center-left parties and coalitions, Bulgarians elected former tsar Simeon Saxe-Coburg (also known as Simeon II) as prime minister in 2001. Political and governmental instability was not solved with Saxe-Coburg's election, as the socio-economic problems that plagued the country persisted.<sup>73, 74, 75</sup>

In 2004, Bulgaria joined NATO, and membership in the European Union followed three years later.<sup>76</sup> Bulgaria's EU membership was complicated by its status as one of the poorest countries in the union and its failure to implement EU-mandated measures against corruption and organized crime. Social, economic, and political instability remained the status quo, prompting popular dissatisfaction and frequent protests. Since 2009, national politics have been dominated by the center-right GERB party. In 2020 the government was led by GERB prime minister Boyko Borisov, who was elected in 2017.<sup>77, 78, 79, 80</sup>

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70 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

71 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

72 BBC News, "Bulgaria Profile—Timeline," 22 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17205431>

73 Jonathan Bousfield and Dan Richardson, *Bulgaria: The Rough Guide* (London: Rough Guides, 1999), 302.

74 Lonely Planet, "Bulgaria: History," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/bulgaria/history>

75 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

76 Lonely Planet, "Bulgaria: History," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/bulgaria/history>

77 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

78 Infoplease, "Bulgaria News & Current Events," n.d., <https://www.infoplease.com/world/countries/bulgaria/news-and-current-events>

79 BBC News, "Bulgaria Profile—Timeline," 22 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17205431>

80 Central Intelligence Agency, "Bulgaria," *World Factbook*, 5 May 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html>

# Bulgaria in Perspective

## Chapter 2 | History, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. The pagan rites practiced by the Slavs and Bulgars were a central feature of the First Bulgarian Empire.  True  False
2. The Orthodox Church played a crucial role in the preservation of Bulgarian culture during Ottoman rule.  True  False
3. Bulgaria's alliances in World War I resulted in significant territorial gains.  True  False
4. After World War II, Tsar Simeon II embraced a communist political ideology and led efforts to nationalize Bulgaria's industry and agriculture.  True  False
5. Despite its integration into NATO and the European Union, present-day Bulgaria continues to be plagued by government corruption and mismanagement.  True  False

# Bulgaria in Perspective

## Chapter 2 | History, Assessment Answers

1. False:  
Christianity became the official religion of the empire in 865 CE and acted as a unifying force for the disparate Bulgars and Slavs.
2. True:  
Bulgarians were allowed to retain their Orthodox faith under Ottoman rule. The church's promotion of Bulgarian thought and writing helped rekindle a sense of national consciousness.
3. False:  
Since Bulgaria was allied with Germany and Austria-Hungary on the losing side of the war, postwar settlements awarded Bulgarian territory to Yugoslavia and Romania.
4. False:  
With the backing of the Soviet military, Bulgarian communists abolished the monarchy and deposed Simeon II in 1946.
5. True:  
Bulgaria has failed to implement EU-mandated measures against corruption and organized crime. Social, economic, and political instability remain the status quo, prompting strong dissatisfaction and frequent protests.



# Chapter 3 | Economy



The streets of Sofia.  
Flickr / Deensel

## Introduction

In the 1990s, Bulgaria underwent a transition from state control and central planning to a more market-based economy. Reforms like privatization of state-run companies and an overhaul of the taxation system initially led to high debt and economic hardship. Hyperinflation devastated expendable incomes. By the turn of the millennium, however, the new economy gained traction; Bulgaria's gross domestic product (GDP)—the overall value of all goods and services created by an economy within a certain period—began to grow, and the standard of living improved. Accession to the European Union in 2007 was followed by the 2008–09 financial crisis, which prompted severe spending cuts. Recovery was fully evident by 2015, driven by EU development funds and demand for Bulgarian exports. Today, the low unemployment rate underlies a severe shortage of skilled labor. While recent GDP figures show slight fluctuations, overall, Bulgaria has demonstrated the highest economic growth in the European Union.<sup>1, 2, 3, 4, 5</sup>

- 1 Central Intelligence Agency, "Bulgaria," *World Factbook*, 2 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html>
- 2 Bozhidar Ivanov, "Bulgarian Agriculture and Agribusiness," *Emerging Europe*, 1 June 2018, <https://emerging-europe.com/bulgaria-2018/bulgarian-agriculture-and-agribusiness/>
- 3 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria" *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>
- 4 World Bank, "Bulgaria, Overview: Country Context," 16 April 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/bulgaria/overview>
- 5 World Bank, "GDP Growth (Annual %)—Bulgaria," n.d., <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=BG>

## Agriculture

Agriculture constitutes 4.3% of Bulgaria's GDP and employs 6.8% of the labor force. The mild climate is suitable for agriculture, and nearly half of the country's territory is used for crops. Cereals, primarily wheat, corn, and barley, cover most cropland. High-quality tobacco is grown in the south and sunflower seeds and sugar beets in the north. Rose oil, grapes, tomatoes, and wine are important export items. Organic agriculture is growing in size and importance.<sup>6, 7, 8, 9, 10</sup>

The main livestock bred are pigs, cattle, sheep, and poultry.<sup>11</sup> Pork is the most popular and widely produced meat.<sup>12</sup> Two important animal agricultural products are sheep's milk cheese and natural yogurt.<sup>13</sup> In 2018, an outbreak of the highly contagious peste des petits ruminants disease—also known as sheep and goat plague—led to the preventative slaughter of thousands of animals.<sup>14, 15</sup>

Forestry is an important part of Bulgaria's economy. Forests cover over 4 million hectares (9.9 million acres), approximately 37% of the country's territory.<sup>16, 17</sup> Most of the country's forests are owned and managed by national or municipal authorities, with just 11% in private hands. Forests are composed of beech, oak, ash, pine, spruce, and fir trees. Bulgaria produces some 7 million cubic m (247 million cubic ft) of timber and lumber annually, of which 10–15% comes from illegal operations.<sup>18</sup>

In 2016, Bulgaria's fish production amounted to over 24,000 metric tons (26,000 U.S. tons). Nearly 65% of the fish production comes from aquaculture, the rearing of fish under controlled conditions. Most of the remaining 35% comes from fishing in the Black Sea, with a minimal amount from the Danube River. The most prominent saltwater fish caught are sprat, mackerel, and anchovy. Mollusks, such as the rapa whelk, are becoming more commercially popular. Bulgaria is one of the lowest consumers of fish in the European Union.<sup>19, 20</sup>

In the 1990s, Bulgarian agriculture began a process of restructuring and modernization. The reforms received a big boost with Bulgaria's EU accession in 2007.<sup>21</sup> Along with other Eastern European countries, Bulgaria became

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- 6 Central Intelligence Agency, "Bulgaria," *World Factbook*, 2 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html>
- 7 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria" *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>
- 8 Climate Change Post, "Bulgaria: Agriculture and Horticulture," 16 May 2020, <https://www.climatechange.org/post/bulgaria-agriculture-and-horticulture/>
- 9 Adrian Bell, "Bulgarian Agriculture Is Full of Surprises," European Network of Agricultural Journalists, 4 July 2018, <https://enaj.eu/bulgarian-agriculture-is-full-of-surprises/>
- 10 Nations Encyclopedia, "Bulgaria—Agriculture," n.d., <https://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/economies/Europe/Bulgaria-AGRICULTURE.html#ixzz6MGmvc5AL>
- 11 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria" *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>
- 12 Foreign Agricultural Service, "Bulgaria: Livestock and Products Annual," United States Department of Agriculture, 2 August 2018, <https://www.fas.usda.gov/data/bulgaria-livestock-and-products-annual-0>
- 13 Nations Encyclopedia, "Bulgaria—Agriculture," n.d., <https://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/economies/Europe/Bulgaria-AGRICULTURE.html#ixzz6MGmvc5AL>
- 14 Angel Krasimirov, "Bulgarian Farmers Protest against Mass Livestock Slaughter," Reuters, 18 July 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bulgaria-ppr-protests/bulgarian-farmers-protest-against-mass-livestock-slaughter-idUSKBN1K81EP>
- 15 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Peste des Petits Ruminants," n.d., <http://www.fao.org/ppr/en/>
- 16 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria" *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>
- 17 Climate Change Post, "Bulgaria: Forestry and Peatlands," 16 May 2020, <https://www.climatechange.org/post/bulgaria-forestry-and-peatlands/>
- 18 Glenn Ojeda, "Bulgaria's Forests and the European Timber Industry," FarmFolio, 7 February 2017, <https://farmfolio.net/articles/bulgarias-forests-timber-industry/>
- 19 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria" *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>
- 20 Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, "Fishery and Aquaculture Country Profiles: The Republic of Bulgaria," Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 3 May 2018, <http://www.fao.org/fishery/facp/BGR/en>
- 21 Bozhidar Ivanov, "Bulgarian Agriculture and Agribusiness," *Emerging Europe*, 1 June 2018, <https://emerging-europe.com/bulgaria-2018/bulgarian-agriculture-and-agribusiness/>

a major recipient of EU agricultural subsidies. Uniquely, in Bulgaria these subsidies were distributed without limits per beneficiary. Well-connected entrepreneurs took advantage of the program by buying up large tracts of agricultural land, claiming vast annual per-hectare subsidy payments, and growing lucrative crops for export. About 75% of subsidies went to some 100 large farms, whose average size was ten times the European norm; smaller farms and growers of traditional products were marginalized or had to close. In 2016, Bulgaria capped agricultural aid at EUR 300,000 (USD 336,930) per applicant per year.<sup>22, 23, 24</sup>

## Industry

Industry makes up 28% of Bulgaria's GDP and employs 26.6% of the workforce. After World War II, Bulgaria began to industrialize rapidly under Soviet-style central planning. Steel and metallurgical works, chemical plants, food processing, and textiles became firmly established. Since the 1990s, biotechnology and machine-building have become increasingly important. Sofia, Varna, Ruse, Burgas, Plovdiv, Dimitrovgrad, and Devnya are the major industrial centers. In 2017, the country's industrial growth rate was 3.6%.<sup>25, 26</sup> Like much of Eastern Europe, Bulgaria's industrial sector suffers from a dire lack of skilled workers.<sup>27, 28</sup>

Car parts manufacturing has been an expansive sector of the economy in recent years. Some 150 companies employ over 40,000 workers throughout the country, about 1% of the total workforce. The sector produces a wide range of parts for global carmakers such as BMW, Ford, and Tesla. About 90% of the airbag sensors for the European auto market are produced in Bulgaria.<sup>29, 30</sup> In early 2020, car parts manufacturers adjusted operations to begin producing protective eyewear in support of Bulgaria's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>31</sup>

22 Selam Gebrekidan et al., "The Money Farmers: How Oligarchs and Populists Milk the E.U. for Millions," *New York Times*, 3 November 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/03/world/europe/eu-farm-subsidy-hungary.html>

23 Euractiv.com with AFP, "EU Funds Feed Bulgaria's Grain Millionaires." Euractiv, 13 September 2016, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/agriculture-food/news/eu-funds-feed-bulgarias-grain-millionaires/>

24 BulgarianPresidency.eu, "Mafia Rules in Bulgarian Agriculture with the Help of EU Subsidies," 12 January 2018, <http://bulgarianpresidency.eu/mafia-rules-bulgarian-agriculture-help-eu-subsidies/>

25 Central Intelligence Agency, "Bulgaria," *World Factbook*, 2 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html>

26 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria" *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

27 Maria Chereseva and Ana Maria Luca, "Skilled Labour Shortage Hits Bulgarian, Romanian Businesses," *BalkanInsight*, 5 February 2018, <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/02/05/skilled-labour-shortage-hits-bulgarian-romanian-businesses-02-04-2018/>

28 Gabrovo (AFP), "Bulgaria Adopts Apprenticeships in Scramble for Workers," *France24* <https://www.france24.com/en/20190130-bulgaria-adopts-apprenticeships-scramble-workers>

29 Novinite.com, "The Automobile Sector—One of the Stars of the Bulgarian Industry in Recent Years," 25 April 2019, <https://www.novinite.com/articles/196691/The+Automobile+Sector+-+One+of+the+Stars+of+the+Bulgarian+Industry+in+Recent+Years>

30 Kerin Hope "Companies Head for Bulgaria, Eastern Europe's Next Frontier," *Financial Times*, 10 January 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/5520c060-d6cc-11e7-ae3e-563c04c5339a>

31 Aleksia Petrova, "Bulgaria to Start Manufacturing Protective Masks, Helmets against Coronavirus," *SeeNews*, 20 March 2020, <https://seenews.com/news/bulgaria-to-start-manufacturing-protective-masks-helmets-against-coronavirus-691723>

## Energy and Natural Resources

In 2018, Bulgaria’s proved reserves of crude oil were 15 million bbl and proved reserves of natural gas were 5.663 billion cubic m (120 billion cubic ft). Bulgaria imports a significant part of its energy, primarily from Russia. The country is part of several slowly developing EU energy infrastructure projects meant to diminish Eastern Europe’s reliance on Russian natural gas.<sup>32, 33</sup>

About one-third of Bulgaria’s energy comes from nuclear power. A Soviet-built nuclear plant at Kozloduy on the Danube River maintains two working reactors; the plant’s four other reactors were closed as part of Bulgaria’s EU accession negotiations.<sup>34, 35, 36</sup>

As much as 20% of Bulgaria’s energy consumption comes from renewable sources. The most widely used renewable source is hydropower, with 242 hydropower plants supplying about 14% of overall energy. Other sources are wind and photovoltaic. Bulgaria plans to increase the share of renewables to 27% by 2030.<sup>37, 38</sup>

Coal is the largest domestic energy source, powering several thermoelectric plants throughout the country. The giant Maritza Iztok energy complex is Bulgaria’s coal sourcing and production hub. The complex contains three lignite coal mines, four coal power plants, a briquette factory, and a vast support infrastructure. Other lignite deposits are found near Pernik, southwest of Sofia, and near Lom, in the northwest of the country.<sup>39, 40, 41, 42</sup>

There are significant black coking coal deposits in Dobruja, in the northeast, and at Kremikovtsi, near Sofia. Iron ore is mined at several locations, and Bulgaria’s mountains contain deposits of copper, lead, and zinc. The Chelopech mine in the Balkan Mountains contains large deposits of gold and copper. Other minerals include gypsum, rock salt, dolomite, limestone, asbestos, kaolin, and barite.<sup>43, 44</sup>

32 Central Intelligence Agency, “Bulgaria,” *World Factbook*, 2 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html>

33 John D. Bell et al., “Bulgaria” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

34 Central Intelligence Agency, “Bulgaria,” *World Factbook*, 2 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html>

35 John D. Bell et al., “Bulgaria” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

36 World Nuclear Association, “Nuclear Power in Bulgaria,” May 2020, <https://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/country-profiles/countries-a-f/bulgaria.aspx>

37 International Trade Administration, “Bulgaria—Renewable Energy,” United States Department of Commerce, 2020, <https://www.trade.gov/energy-resource-guide-bulgaria-renewable-energy>

38 World Nuclear Association, “Nuclear Power in Bulgaria,” May 2020, <https://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/country-profiles/countries-a-f/bulgaria.aspx>

39 Central Intelligence Agency, “Bulgaria,” *World Factbook*, 2 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html>

40 John D. Bell et al., “Bulgaria” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

41 South-east European Industrial Market, “Thermal Power Plants Market in Bulgaria,” 2010, <https://www.see-industry.com/en/thermal-power-plants-market-in-bulgaria/2/622/>

42 CEE Bankwatch Network, “Just Transition in Bulgaria—Mission Possible for Maritsa Iztok Energy Complex?” 23 November 2018, <https://bankwatch.org/publication/just-transition-in-bulgaria-mission-possible-for-maritsa-iztok-energy-complex>

43 John D. Bell et al., “Bulgaria” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>

44 Bankwatch, “The Weight of Gold, Bulgaria,” Mining See, 21 January 2019, <https://www.miningsee.eu/weight-gold-bulgaria/>

## Services

The services sector makes up 67.4% of Bulgaria's GDP and employs 66.6% of the labor force. The sector is expanding as Bulgaria moves beyond its former manufacturing-based economic model to focus on entrepreneurship and innovation.<sup>45, 46</sup> Some of the sector's main components are business services, transportation and logistics, film and television production, and real estate.<sup>47, 48</sup>

Information technology (IT) is the primary driver of the services sector. In recent years, Sofia, Plovdiv, Burgas, and Varna have become important tech hubs, attracting IT outsourcing from Silicon Valley and teeming with startups, incubators, and networking events. The sector supports 94,000 jobs and generated over USD 3 billion in sales in 2018. Bulgaria has the third-highest number of certified IT professionals in Europe. The country's strong IT credentials date back to the 1960s when it became the Soviet sphere's primary center for electronics and computing. Today, the national education system has a strong IT emphasis, and Bulgarians enjoy some of the world's fastest broadband speeds.<sup>49, 50, 51, 52, 53</sup>

## Tourism

Part of the services sector, tourism contributes as much as 20% to Bulgaria's GDP. The country is seen as one of Europe's fastest-growing tourist destinations. Some 9.3 million tourists visited Bulgaria in 2019, an increase of 0.4% over the previous year. The greatest number of foreign tourists came from Romania, followed by Greece, Germany, Turkey, and North Macedonia.<sup>54, 55</sup>

Bulgaria's main tourist attraction is its Black Sea coast, sometimes referred to as the Bulgarian Riviera. In addition to the major port cities of Varna and Burgas, the coast is dotted with quaint seaside resorts offering warm beaches and attractive amenities at affordable prices. Some of the more well-known resorts include (from north to south):

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- 45 Central Intelligence Agency, "Bulgaria," *World Factbook*, 2 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html>
- 46 Henry Foy, "How Drones Lift Agriculture in Bulgaria to a Higher Plane," *Financial Times*, 5 April 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/e784e99e-e60b-11e5-a09b-1f8b0d268c39>
- 47 Aleksia Petrova, "Turnover Indices in Bulgaria's Services Sector Rise Y/Y in Q3," SeeNews, 25 November 2019, <https://seenews.com/news/turnover-indices-in-bulgarias-services-sector-rise-yy-in-q3-677615>
- 48 Radio Bulgaria, "Services, Industry Leading Economic Sectors in Bulgaria," 1 September 2018, <https://www.bnr.bg/en/post/100918128/services-industry-leading-economic-sectors-in-bulgaria>
- 49 Kerin Hope, "Bulgaria Strives to Become Tech Capital of the Balkans," *Financial Times*, 16 October 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/f9a35122-44f4-11e6-9b66-0712b3873ae1>
- 50 Chris O'Brien, "Bulgaria Rising: Can a Growing Startup Movement Reinvent the Country's Economy?" *VentureBeat*, 23 March 2018, <https://venturebeat.com/2018/03/23/bulgaria-rising-can-a-growing-startup-movement-reinvent-the-countrys-economy/>
- 51 Trade Commissioner Service, "The Labour Market in Bulgaria," Embassy of Canada to Romania, Bulgaria and the Republic of Moldova, March 2018, <https://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/romania-roumanie/market-facts-faits-sur-le-marche/0002297.aspx?lang=eng>
- 52 Reuters, "Germany's Commerzbank May Open 400-strong IT Hub in Bulgaria: Minister," 5 December 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-commerzbank-bulgaria/germanys-commerzbank-may-open-400-strong-it-hub-in-bulgaria-minister-idUSKBN1Y92CW>
- 53 Dispatches Europe, "Sun, Sea and Startups: Varna Is Pushing to Become Bulgaria's Tech and Innovation Hub," 7 March 2018, <https://dispatcheseurope.com/sun-sea-and-startups-varna-is-pushing-to-become-bulgarias-tech-and-innovation-hub/>
- 54 Sofia Globe, "Foreign Tourist Visits to Bulgaria in 2019 Were Slightly Up on 2018—Statistics Institute," 28 January 2020, <https://sofiaglobe.com/2020/01/28/foreign-tourist-visits-to-bulgaria-in-2019-were-slightly-up-on-2018-statistics-institute/>
- 55 Euro News, "Bulgaria, an Emerging Tourist Destination," 26 July 2019, <https://www.euronews.com/2018/07/12/bulgaria-an-emerging-tourist-destination>

Albena, with white sand beaches and mineral springs; Obzor, with ancient Greek and Roman ruins; Nessebar, dating back to the Byzantine era; and Ahtopol, with a rocky shoreline and old-fashioned wooden houses.<sup>56, 57, 58, 59</sup>

In the Rhodopes Mountains, resorts like Pamporovo, Borovets, and Bansko offer world-class skiing in winter and scenic hiking in summer. Also in the south, Pirin National Park is a World Heritage Site with abundant animal and plant life and pristine mountain lakes. To the north of Pirin is the Rila Monastery complex, considered the most important repository of Bulgaria's cultural heritage.<sup>60, 61</sup>

## Trade

Since 2015, Bulgaria has maintained a positive balance of trade, meaning that the value of its exports surpassed that of its imports. In 2018 the trade balance was USD 1.71 billion, or 2.63% of GDP. The country's major export partners are Germany, Italy, Romania, Turkey, Greece, Belgium, and France. The major export commodities are clothing, footwear, iron and steel, machinery and equipment, fuels, agriculture, tobacco, and IT components. Major import partners are Germany, Russia, Italy, Romania, Turkey, Spain, and Greece. Major import commodities are machinery and equipment, metals and ores, chemicals and plastics, fuels, minerals, and raw materials.<sup>62, 63</sup>

Bulgaria's accession to the European Union in 2007 provided a considerable boost in trade. The country has bilateral free trade agreements with China, Turkey, North Macedonia, Israel, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>64, 65</sup>

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- 56 VacationIdea, "25 Best Places to Visit in Bulgaria," 18 May 2020, <https://vacationidea.com/destinations/bulgaria.html>
- 57 Bohemian Blog, "The Strange and Tragic History of Bulgaria's Cape Kaliakra," 31 May 2013, <http://www.thebohemianblog.com/2013/05/dark-tourism-cape-kaliakra-bulgaria.html>
- 58 We Find You Go, "Top 10 Best Tourist Attractions in Bulgaria," 13 February 2018, <https://www.wefindyougo.com/best-tourist-attractions-in-bulgaria/>
- 59 Tamara Sheward, "Bulgarian Riviera: Best Beaches of the Black Sea Coast," Lonely Planet, 15 December 2014, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/articles/bulgarian-riviera-best-beaches-of-the-black-sea-coast>
- 60 We Find You Go, "Top 10 Best Tourist Attractions in Bulgaria," 13 February 2018, <https://www.wefindyougo.com/best-tourist-attractions-in-bulgaria/>
- 61 VacationIdea, "25 Best Places to Visit in Bulgaria," 18 May 2020, <https://vacationidea.com/destinations/bulgaria.html>
- 62 Macrotrends, "Bulgaria Trade Balance 1980–2020," 2020, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/BGR/bulgaria/trade-balance-deficit>
- 63 Central Intelligence Agency, "Bulgaria," *World Factbook*, 2 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html>
- 64 Nordea Trade, "Bulgaria: Economic and Political Overview: Foreign Trade Figures of Bulgaria," June 2020, <https://www.nordeatrade.com/en/explore-new-market/bulgaria/trade-profile>
- 65 International Trade Administration, "Bulgaria: Trade Agreements," United States Department of Commerce, 13 October 2019, <https://www.trade.gov/knowledge-product/bulgaria-trade-agreements>

# Banking and Finance

## Banking

Bulgaria's national currency is the Bulgarian lev (BGN). BGN 1 is subdivided into 100 stotinki. In June 2020, USD 1 was worth BGN 1.74.<sup>66, 67</sup> Public debt stands at USD 18.2 billion, 21.1% of GDP, among the lowest rates in the European Union.<sup>68, 69, 70</sup>

In the post-communist era of the 1990s, Bulgaria's struggling economy brought about hyperinflation, which peaked at 242% per month in February 1997. Later that year, Bulgaria adopted a currency board. This fiscal authority pegged the BGN to the German mark (and starting in 2002, to the euro) at a fixed rate and imposed restrictions such as limiting the government's borrowing abilities. The imposition of the currency board is credited with immediately stopping hyperinflation, creating long-term fiscal stability, and leading to a significant reduction in the national debt. The currency board remains very popular among Bulgarians, who view it as one of the country's few unequivocal present-day successes. In 2015, Bulgaria opened negotiations to join the Eurozone; the process stalled in early 2020 due to economic uncertainty in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>71, 72, 73, 74</sup>

Bulgaria's fiscal policy, including the currency board, is set and managed by the Bulgarian National Bank. Founded in 1879, it is among the world's oldest central banks.<sup>75, 76</sup> In April 2020, the bank approved a moratorium on all private loan payments, an unprecedented measure attempting to mitigate the economic damage from the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>77</sup>

Bulgaria's banking sector was reformed in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with wholesale privatization of state-owned banks and consolidation of smaller banks under large corporations or foreign banks. Today there are some 28 commercial banks in the country. Foreign-owned banks, primarily from Italy, Austria, Hungary, and Greece, make up 70% of the market.<sup>78, 79</sup>

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## Finance

After peaking at USD 12.4 billion in 2007, foreign direct investment (FDI) into Bulgaria has steadily declined, amounting to USD 2.05 billion in 2018. That same year, the country's total FDI stock was USD 49.2 billion, 75.9% of GDP. FDI is defined as investment across borders in which an investor from one economy significantly controls or influences a business enterprise in another economy. The primary recipients of FDI in Bulgaria are real estate, manufacturing, and financial and insurance activities. The biggest investor is the Netherlands, followed by Austria, Germany, and Italy. Low corporate tax rates, low labor costs, and a relatively speedy bureaucracy make Bulgaria attractive to foreign investors. The main perceived drawbacks to investment are a shortage of skilled labor, corruption, and poorly enforced regulations.<sup>80, 81, 82</sup> In 2020, Bulgaria was ranked 61 out of 190 countries for ease of doing business.<sup>83</sup> It ranked 74 out of 198 countries in the 2019 Transparency International Corruption Index.<sup>84</sup>

## Standard of Living

Bulgaria ranks 52 out of 189 countries on the UN Human Development Index, which measures a country's standard of living based on key dimensions. Among Balkan countries, it trails only Slovenia, Greece, and Croatia. Life expectancy is 75 years—78.5 for females and 71.8 for males.<sup>85, 86, 87</sup>

Bulgaria's health expenditures were 8.1% of GDP in 2017. The level of healthcare funding is inadequate, resulting in a lack of access for disadvantaged persons. The infant mortality rate is 8.1 per 1,000 live births. The maternal mortality rate is 10 deaths per 100,000 live births.<sup>88, 89</sup> The top causes of premature death are ischemic heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, and hypertensive heart disease. The top risk factors that drive death and disability are high blood pressure, dietary risks, tobacco use, and a high body mass index.<sup>90, 91</sup>

Some 22% of Bulgaria's population lives in poverty, with the poverty line at USD 201.87 per month. In 2017, GDP per capita was USD 21,800, a global ranking of 87 and the lowest in the European Union. Poverty is much more prevalent among the Roma ethnic group (68.3%) than among ethnic Bulgarians (15.6%). Poverty is also higher among single persons over 65 years of age, single parents, and families with three or more children.<sup>92, 93</sup>

80 Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute, "Foreign Direct Investment," n.d., [https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/foreign\\_direct\\_investment](https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/foreign_direct_investment)

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87 Novinite.com, "Bulgaria Ranks 52nd Out of 189 Countries in the Human Development Index," 9 December 2019, <https://www.novinite.com/articles/202116/Bulgaria+Ranks+52nd+out+of+189+Countries+in+the+Human+Development+Index>

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89 Trade Commissioner Service, "The Labour Market in Bulgaria," Embassy of Canada to Romania, Bulgaria and the Republic of Moldova, March 2018, <https://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/romania-roumanie/market-facts-faits-sur-le-marche/0002297.aspx?lang=eng>

90 Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, "Bulgaria," University of Washington, 2019, <http://www.healthdata.org/bulgaria>

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92 Sofia Globe, "Twenty-two Percent of Bulgarians below Poverty Line in 2018—Statistics Institute," 30 April 2019, <https://sofiaglobe.com/2019/04/30/twenty-two-per-cent-of-bulgarians-below-poverty-line-in-2018-statistics-institute/>

93 Central Intelligence Agency, "Bulgaria," *World Factbook*, 2 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html>



Bulgaria has one of the world's fastest decreasing population rates, with the population declining from almost 9 million in 1989 to just over 7 million in 2019. Some 1.3 million Bulgarians live abroad, taking advantage of better wage prospects in Western European countries. Many of those who stay in the country are elderly; the average age in the country is 43. The government is offering incentives like support with childcare and mortgages in the hopes of boosting birthrates.<sup>94, 95, 96, 97</sup>

## Employment

Bulgaria's labor force, the number of employed persons, consists of 3.35 million people.<sup>98</sup> In 2019, Bulgaria's unemployment rate hit a seven-year low of 4.3%, one of the lowest figures in the European Union.<sup>99</sup> The country is experiencing a pronounced labor shortage, especially in highly skilled fields like chemical and electrical engineering. The primary causes of the shrinking labor pool are low fertility, emigration, and an aging labor force. Gender discrimination can discourage women from seeking employment, thereby further diminishing the labor force.<sup>100, 101</sup>

Bulgaria's low labor costs complicate the employment situation. With the lowest minimum wage in the European Union at USD 327 per month, Bulgaria is attractive to companies looking to conduct low-cost operations. Conversely, the low wages make it difficult to attract foreign workers and drive highly skilled Bulgarians to seek better-paying jobs abroad. The government is attempting to address the labor shortage problem by making it easier for companies operating in Bulgaria to attract skilled professionals from non-EU countries.<sup>102, 103, 104</sup>

The vast majority of Bulgaria's workforce belongs to one of over 100,000 labor unions. The two biggest unions are the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria and the Podkrepa Confederation of Labor. Unions oppose measures to help fill labor shortages with low-cost third-country workers. Instead, unions are organizing to demand higher wages, better benefits, and improved working conditions.<sup>105, 106, 107, 108</sup>

- 94 Gabrovo (AFP), "Bulgaria Adopts Apprenticeships in Scramble for Workers," France24, 30 January 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190130-bulgaria-adopts-apprenticeships-scramble-workers>
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## Outlook

Bulgaria's strong economic performance in recent years is tempered by persistent challenges. The most significant hindrances to economic growth are ongoing government corruption, an inconsistent rule of law, and an opaque business environment. The COVID-19 crisis is expected to cause a recession. High job losses will lead to higher poverty, greater demand for social assistance, and an overall increase in economic precarity. To regain growth and stability, Bulgaria will have to rely on its sound economic and fiscal policies and assistance from the European Union.<sup>109, 110</sup>

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109 Central Intelligence Agency, "Bulgaria," *World Factbook*, 2 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html>

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# Bulgaria in Perspective

## Chapter 3 | Economy, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. EU-financed agricultural reforms have led to the marginalization of small farmers and large tracts of Bulgaria's farmland being controlled by a few well-connected entrepreneurs.  True  False
2. A significant part of Bulgaria's electricity is generated by nuclear power.  True  False
3. Bulgaria's strong information technology credentials date back to the 1960s when it was the Soviet sphere's primary center for electronics and computing.  True  False
4. Bulgaria is plagued by persistent inflation as its currency is constantly weakened against the U.S. dollar and euro.  True  False
5. Bulgaria has one of the fastest declining population rates in the world.  True  False

# Bulgaria in Perspective

## Chapter 3 | Economy, Assessment Answers

1. True:  
EU farm subsidies were distributed without limits per beneficiary in Bulgaria. About 75% of subsidies went to approximately 100 large farms, whose average size was ten times the European norm.
2. True:  
About one-third of Bulgaria's energy comes from nuclear power generated at a Soviet-built nuclear plant in Kozloduy on the Danube River.
3. True:  
Today, IT is the primary driver of the services sector, supporting 94,000 jobs, and generating billions of dollars in revenue.
4. False:  
In 1997 Bulgaria adopted a currency board, a fiscal authority that would peg its currency to the euro at a fixed rate. The currency board is credited with immediately stopping hyperinflation and creating long-term fiscal stability.
5. True:  
Bulgaria's population declined from almost nine million in 1989 to just over seven million in 2019. The government is offering incentives like childcare support and mortgages with the hopes of boosting birthrates.

## Chapter 4 | Society



Bulgarian folk dancers in traditional clothing.  
Flickr / Donald Judge

### Introduction

Bulgaria's national identity was defined by centuries of Ottoman rule, the devastating toll of regional and world wars, and communist personality cults. Despite its tumultuous history, Bulgaria's impulses toward moderation and eschewing of extremism gave shape to its national character. Bulgarians tend to see their identity as an amalgam of language, history, and culture, rather than the result of biology or race. Nevertheless, there are stark and pronounced differences between the ethnic Bulgarian majority and minorities such as Turks and Roma, which are demonstrably disadvantaged. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church is revered for having safeguarded Bulgarian culture during the Ottoman era. After being suppressed by the communist regime, the church has resumed its prominent place in public life and consciousness. Bulgarian culture has found rich expression through traditional cuisine and dress, as well as through the creativity of musicians and artists.<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>

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2 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria" *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>  
3 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/>

## Ethnic Groups

Ethnic Bulgarians are Bulgaria's largest ethnic group, accounting for 76.9% of the population in 2011. Turks make up the next-largest group, with approximately 8% of the population, or around 750,000 people. The Roma people are another prominent group at 4.4% of the population. Other ethnic groups include Armenians, Russians, Greeks, Romanians, and Tatars.<sup>4, 5, 6</sup>

### *Bulgarians*

Bulgarians, a South Slavic group, trace their roots back to the assimilation of various settlers in the region ahead of the establishment of the First Bulgarian Empire in 681.<sup>7</sup> The vast majority of Bulgarians are Eastern Orthodox and speak Bulgarian as their mother tongue.<sup>8</sup> The Bulgarian language is part of the South Slavic group of languages, which also includes Slovene and Serbo-Croatian; the language is also closely related to Macedonian. Like most other Slavic languages, Bulgarian uses the Cyrillic alphabet.<sup>9</sup>

### *Turks*

Turks arrived with the Ottoman conquest of the region during the 15th century. Bulgarian Turks are primarily Muslim and maintain a culture and traditions that differ from the Eastern Orthodox-influenced culture of other Bulgarians.<sup>10</sup>

Bulgarian Turks are subject to discrimination and ethnic tension within Bulgaria. Between 1984 and 1989, a forced exodus campaign saw some 370,000 Bulgarian Turks sent to Turkey as part of "revival" efforts designed to create a homogenous Bulgaria.<sup>11, 12</sup> The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), a Bulgarian political party that represents Bulgarian Turks and Muslims, has fought an uphill battle against the anti-Turkish sentiment in Bulgaria's political culture since its formation in 1990.<sup>13, 14, 15</sup>

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- 4 John D. Bell et al., "Bulgaria" *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria>
  - 5 Central Intelligence Agency, "Bulgaria," *World Factbook*, 2 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html>
  - 6 Kerem Öktem, "Kurdish in Turkey, Turkish in Bulgaria," Free Speech Debate, 17 February 2012, <https://freespeechdebate.com/case/kurdish-in-turkey-turkish-in-bulgaria/>
  - 7 Central Intelligence Agency, "Bulgaria," *World Factbook*, 2 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html>
  - 8 Boneva Manka, "Ethnic Identities in the Making: The Case of Bulgaria," *Cultural Survival*, June 1995, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/ethnic-identities-making-case-bulgaria>
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  - 12 Tomasz Kamusella, "Bulgaria's Denial of Its Ottoman Past and Turkish Identity," *New Eastern Europe*, 24 March 2019, <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2019/03/24/bulgarias-denial-of-its-ottoman-past-and-turkish-identity/>
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  - 15 Sofia Globe, "Bulgaria's MRF, Other Turkish Parties Commemorate Victims of Communist-era 'Revival Process,'" 26 December 2018, <https://sofiaglobe.com/2018/12/26/bulgarias-mrf-other-ethnic-turkish-parties-commemorate-victims-of-communist-era-revival-process/>

While Turks and other minorities are entitled to an education in their native languages, the actual implementation of Turkish language classes is often hindered by bureaucratic hurdles and tacit resistance from local education officials. As a result, only a minuscule number of students take Turkish language classes.<sup>16, 17</sup>

## Roma

The Roma people are scattered throughout the country, commonly found in urban environments, and speak several dialects. Many Roma are Muslim.<sup>18</sup> The Roma minority is subject to harassment from non-Roma Bulgarians and marginalization from the government. Roma also experience significant discrimination, which has manifested among nationalists in protests and demonstrations throughout the country. Protests have turned violent, spurring fear among the Roma population. Roma settlements have been targeted, quarantined, or torn down after claims they were illegally erected.<sup>19, 20, 21, 22, 23</sup>

## Religion

### Eastern Orthodox

Orthodox Christianity is the most common religion in Bulgaria and occupies a prominent place in the identity of the Bulgarian ethnic majority. From the 14th to the 19th centuries, the church played a key role in resisting both Turkish and Greek efforts to assimilate Bulgarians into their respective cultures and faiths.<sup>24</sup> In the second half of the 20th century, the communists restricted and limited the influence of religious institutions, shutting down places of worship and banning religious holidays.<sup>25</sup> Upon the collapse of communism, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church experienced a revival in Bulgarian society.<sup>26</sup> The church's ascendancy has been tainted by accusations of corruption and by revelations that many of its leaders acted as informants for the secret police during the communist era.<sup>27</sup>

The Bulgarian Orthodox Church blends some Western customs with the traditions of Eastern Orthodox churches; for example, Christmas is celebrated 25 December in Bulgaria (with a Second Day of Christmas celebrated on 26 December), as opposed to the Eastern Orthodox date of 7 January. Bulgarian Christians also adopted the concept of the Muslim pilgrimage, hajj, for their purposes—the Bulgarian *hadzhi*. The *hadzhi* is a pilgrimage to

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- 16 Kerem Öktem, “Kurdish in Turkey, Turkish in Bulgaria,” Free Speech Debate, 17 February 2012, <https://freespeechdebate.com/case/kurdish-in-turkey-turkish-in-bulgaria/>
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- 23 Patrick Kingsley and Boryana Dzhabazova, “Europe’s Roma Already Faced Discrimination. The Pandemic Made It Worse.” *New York Times*, 6 July 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/06/world/europe/coronavirus-roma-bulgaria.html>
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- 25 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Bulgarian Orthodox Church,” 22 February 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bulgarian-Orthodox-Church>
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- 27 Matthew Brunwasser, “Bulgaria’s Unholy Alliances,” *New York Times*, 7 March 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/08/world/europe/bulgarias-unholy-alliances.html>

Jerusalem and has origins dating back to the 16th century. Upon completion of the pilgrimage, it is customary for Bulgarian Christians to apply the prefix Hadzhi to their surname.<sup>28</sup>

The church's ruling body, the Holy Synod, acts as clerical, judicial, and administrative authority. An estimated 6.7 million Bulgarians claim church membership. Each church building in Bulgaria is assigned a patron saint and sells icons of that saint for parishioners to display. Fueled by the religious revival of the 1990s, the church rebuilt, restored, and reclaimed many church buildings; it also maintains 13 dioceses and publishes weekly and monthly periodicals.<sup>29</sup> There is a theological academy in Sofia, as well as many smaller seminaries throughout the country. There are Bulgarian Orthodox churches outside of the country, in places such as the United States, Canada, and Australia.<sup>30, 31, 32</sup>

## Islam

Islam is the second-largest religious community in Bulgaria.<sup>33</sup> Bulgaria's Muslims overwhelmingly belong to the Sunni subgroup of Islam. In 2011, their population was approximately 546,000, almost 20 times the Shia population, the next largest Muslim group.<sup>34</sup> Bulgaria's Muslim-majority ethnic groups—Turks, Tatars, and some Roma—reside heavily in the northeast, the Rhodope Mountains region, and along the country's border with Turkey. Ethnic Bulgarian Muslims, commonly known as Pomaks, are largely the result of centuries of religious conversions during Ottoman rule. Roma, the third-largest Muslim ethnic group in the country, are scattered throughout Bulgaria.<sup>35</sup>

Communist rule placed significant pressure on Muslims, leading to the emigration of an estimated 300,000 Turks and Pomaks in the late 1980s. After 1989, Muslims achieved newfound freedom, similar to Bulgaria's Christians. In some instances, new churches and mosques were built near each other or even side-by-side. The Büyük Mosque, one of the oldest in Europe, is located in Sofia, where several different places of worship exist within close proximity of each other.<sup>36, 37, 38</sup>

Pomaks have been subjected to numerous efforts at assimilation into mainstream Bulgarian society, asking them to abandon their religion and culture.<sup>39</sup> Bulgarian Muslims are the largest Muslim minority in any European Union nation. Despite a history of internal pressures, Muslims have resisted radicalization and maintained a relatively harmonious relationship with the rest of the country.<sup>40, 41</sup>

28 Agnes Sachsenroeder, *CultureShock! A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette: Bulgaria* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Corp., 2008), 50.

29 Information Bulgaria, "Explore Bulgarian Religion," n.d., <https://www.informationbulgaria.com/religion-in-bulgaria/>

30 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Bulgarian Orthodox Church," 22 February 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bulgarian-Orthodox-Church>

31 Monk Nicodemus, "History of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church," St. Herman Press, 2002, <https://www.bulgariandiocese.org/bulgarianchurchhx>

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34 Antonina Zhelyazkova, "Islam: Muslims in Bulgaria," Oasis, 8 May 2019, <https://www.oasiscenter.eu/en/who-are-muslims-in-bulgaria>

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## Other Religions

While Eastern Orthodox Christianity is the religious majority, other Christian denominations have a presence in the country. There are some 40,000 Catholics in Bulgaria, mostly in the northwest of the country. Protestantism, brought into Bulgaria by its interactions with the United States, has a minor presence throughout the country, particularly with Roma and ethnic Bulgarians.<sup>42</sup> Bulgaria is also home to smaller clusters of other religions, accounting for about 29% of the population. These include Baha'i, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Judaism, Shintoism, Sikhism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism. Several traditional beliefs are practiced, such as animism, Badimo, Confucianism, Kirant, paganism, shamanism, and spiritualism.<sup>43, 44</sup>

## Cuisine

Bulgarian cuisine was shaped by the cuisines of Italy, Greece, and Turkey and features Asian, Middle Eastern, and other European influences. Many traditional Bulgarian recipes include dairy, fruit, and vegetables. Yogurt, sirene (feta cheese), and meat are also food staples; pork and chicken are the most popular meats. Spit-roasted sheep or goats are common for celebratory meals.<sup>45, 46</sup>

Common Bulgarian meals are gyuvech (meat and vegetable stew), kufte (spicy ground meat patty), meshane (mixed salad), and banitsa (pastries stuffed with meats and cheeses).<sup>47</sup> Rakia, the national drink, can be distilled from almost any available fruit, most commonly grapes, plums, or apricots. It is frequently served during meals, usually dinner.<sup>48, 49</sup> Bulgarian honey has a reputation for its delicious taste, nutritional value, and supposed healing qualities, attributed to the unique variety of rare or endangered flowers that grow in the country. A popular dish is tolumbi, a honey-soaked pastry log.<sup>50, 51</sup>

Yogurt is an important ingredient in Bulgarian cuisine, believed to have been first created by the shepherders of ancient Thrace. Bulgarians consume yogurt as a drink called ayran and often enjoy it as part of dishes like stuffed peppers and bean stew. Tarator is a cold soup made with yogurt, dill, cucumbers, and garlic.<sup>52, 53</sup>

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- 51 Lonely Planet, "Bulgaria in Detail: Eating," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/bulgaria/in-location/eating/a/nar/b1474e80-6932-483e-8009-d439c4e764d8/358731>
- 52 Bacillus Bulgaricus: "Bulgarian Yogurt: History of Bulgarian Yogurt," 8 January 2018, <https://bacillusbulgaricus.com/yogurt-history/>
- 53 Maria Angelova, "Why are Bulgarians so Proud of Their Yoghurt?" Culture Trip, 5 September 2018, <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/bulgaria/articles/bulgarian-yogurt-why-are-bulgarians-so-proud-of-it/>

Bulgaria produces the most herbs and spices of all EU members and is one of the top three exporters in the world.<sup>54, 55</sup> Parsley is featured in virtually all Bulgarian dishes. Other common herbs are basil, thyme, oregano, and spearmint. Bilkov is a popular herbal tea.<sup>56, 57</sup>

Coffee and tea are everyday drinks for many Bulgarians. Wine and beer are also popular; fruit beers, with relatively low alcohol content, have grown in popularity in recent times.<sup>58</sup>

Street food is popular throughout the country. Banitsa dominates the street food market, along with *palachinki* (savory pancakes), *mekitshi* (yogurt donuts), and *kiflichki* (croissant buns). Corn on the cob and toasted sunflower seeds are also commonly found with street vendors.<sup>59, 60</sup>

## Traditional Dress

Bulgarian clothing is influenced by modern Western culture. For casual outings, jeans and walking shoes are sufficient; good quality shoes, in particular, are important in rural areas, as it is common to come across sidewalks and pathways that are in disrepair. In winter months, boots with soft rubber soles are recommended.<sup>61</sup>

Traditional folk clothing is not as common as modern Western clothing but is still seen in public events and celebrations, such as weddings, holidays, and festivals. The traditional garb features ornate embroidery, a skill that has been traditionally passed down to Bulgarian women starting at the age of 12. The embroidered imagery itself is significant, as the pattern was believed to protect the wearer from evil spells and spirits. Many of the patterns and elements of traditional clothing are pagan in origin. The general features of traditional clothing have not changed much over hundreds of years; men wore pants, shirts, vests, and girdles, while women wore dresses and aprons.<sup>62, 63</sup>

Formal or business clothing in Bulgaria follows the trends of other Western and European countries. Depending on the industry or profession, the clothing varies in its level of formality. Men are generally expected to wear suits, while women are expected to wear appropriate business attire.<sup>64, 65</sup>

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- 54 Sofia News Agency, "Bulgaria Is the Largest Producer of Herbs in the European Union," 7 January 2019, <https://www.novinite.com/articles/194295/Bulgaria+is+the+Largest+Producer+of+Herbs+in+the+European+Union>
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- 57 Lonely Planet, "Bulgaria in Detail: Eating," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/bulgaria/in-location/eating/a/nar/b1474e80-6932-483e-8009-d439c4e764d8/358731>
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- 59 Lonely Planet, "Bulgaria in Detail: Eating," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/bulgaria/in-location/eating/a/nar/b1474e80-6932-483e-8009-d439c4e764d8/358731>
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- 65 Just Landed, "Bulgarian Business Etiquette: Culture of Business Meetings, Dresscode," n.d., <https://www.justlanded.com/english/Bulgaria/Bulgaria-Guide/Business/Bulgarian-business-etiquette>

## Gender Issues

Despite patriarchal traditions, women in modern Bulgaria commonly hold equal responsibility in family units or otherwise have substantial authority in their households. Men and women both have the right to own property and vote. Although laws grant equality for all citizens, women are often hit harder by unemployment or underemployment and are slightly behind men in terms of educational achievements.<sup>66</sup>

Bulgaria has made strides toward gender equality. In 2015, the country passed gender equality laws to achieve equality within 15 years. Through coordination with the state and specialized bodies, Bulgaria seeks to strengthen provisions for equal treatment, equal access to resources, and equality in every aspect of social, economic, and political life.<sup>67, 68</sup>

Bulgaria's strongest advancements in gender equality have been in healthcare and employment. In a 2005–15 study, 94% of men and women reported being able to access medical and dental services. With improvements in healthcare access, life expectancy for men and women has increased, although the number of healthy years for both has decreased.<sup>69</sup>

In early 2018, Bulgaria ratified the Istanbul Convention, an international effort headed by the Council of Europe to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence.<sup>70</sup> Political parties such as the United Patriots Alliance opposed this decision, and in July 2018, the Bulgarian high court declared the Istanbul Convention to be unconstitutional. The United Nations has encouraged Bulgaria to reconsider its stance on the convention and reopen the ratification process.<sup>71, 72, 73</sup>

Domestic violence is a significant concern. In 2016, it was estimated that one-third of Bulgarians experienced domestic or gender-based violence within their lifetime. Despite laws aimed at curbing the violence, victims have accused state authorities of being ineffective in addressing the issue.<sup>74</sup> In light of the government's rejection of the Istanbul Convention and the other factors jeopardizing the progress of gender equality, the advancement of women's rights has increasingly become a grassroots issue.<sup>75</sup>

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## Arts

### Traditional Art

Much of traditional Bulgarian art was religious. The 13th-century frescoes depicting Byzantine canonical themes at the Boyana church complex near Sofia are considered national treasures. During the Ottoman era, icon painting became a symbol of Bulgarian national identity. In the early 19th century, Zahari Zograf (1810–53) became well-known for his expressive and detailed murals of saints and sinners on monastery walls.<sup>76, 77, 78</sup>

Traditional pottery-making is well-established and prevalent. The notable *troyanska kapka* style, developed in the 19th century, is characterized by hues of cobalt blue, green, brown, and yellow, by a unique glazing technique, and by decorations with concentric circles and wavy lines. Once a flourishing enterprise, carpet weaving is on the verge of disappearance. Traditional carpets, adorned with geometric patterns as well as bird and flower designs, were both practical and decorative.<sup>79</sup>

The national revival period of the 19th century gave rise to several distinct architectural styles throughout Bulgaria. Houses from this period were made of wood and stone and painted brown and white. Prominent features included bay windows, tiled roofs, and intricately carved ceilings. The villages of Koprivshitsa, Tryavna, and Karlovo contain well-preserved examples of traditional architecture.<sup>80</sup>

Folk music and dance styles vary from region to region. Music typically consists of complex polyphonic harmonies, irregular rhythms, and haunting minor-key vocals. Traditional instruments include the *gaida* (bagpipes), *gadulka* (a violin-like instrument), and *kaval* (flute). Vocalists are commonly women. Circle and line dances, called *horo*, have fast-paced, complex steps.<sup>81, 82</sup>

### Painting and Sculpture

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Bulgarian painters like Anton Mitov, Georgi Mashev, and Zlatyu Boyadzhiev produced insightful portraits, pastoral landscapes, and depictions of everyday Bulgarian life. Vladimir Dimitrov (1892–1960) is considered the master of Bulgarian painting. His works portray the relationship between man and nature in a vivid, idealistic, profoundly original style. The most prominent 20th-century sculptor was Andrey Nikolov (1878–1959), influenced by French styles. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the Bulgarian-born environmental sculptor Christo (1935–2020) rose to worldwide acclaim for his elaborately planned and executed temporary works like wrapping the Reichstag building in Berlin with fabric or installing 7,500 orange metal and fabric gates along 37 km (23 mi) of footpaths in New York City’s Central Park.<sup>83, 84, 85, 86</sup>

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80 Lonely Planet, “Bulgaria in Detail: Arts, Crafts & Architecture,” 7 August 2019, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/bulgaria/background/other-features/ae98fcc8-1ed0-4eee-8745-b373ef01db70/a/nar/ae98fcc8-1ed0-4eee-8745-b373ef01db70/358731>

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85 Gergana Mancheva, “Vladimir Dimitrov—The Master, a Colossus of Bulgarian Painting,” Radio Bulgaria, 23 June 2019, <https://www.bnr.bg/en/post/101134200/vladimir-dimitrov-the-master-a-colossus-of-bulgarian-painting>

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## Music

Starting in the late 19th century, Bulgarian composers focused on opera and choral compositions. The sacred choral works of Dobri Hristov (1875–1941) possess a moving, ethereal quality. Jazz began flourishing in Bulgaria after World War I; today, the country hosts several annual jazz festivals. A popular present-day style is *chalga*, a fast-paced pop music subgenre that fuses Balkan, Middle Eastern, and flamenco styles and comes packaged in flashy music videos.<sup>87, 88</sup>

## Literature

The *Slav-Bulgarian History* by Paisii Hilendarski (1722–73) is considered the first major Bulgarian language literary work. It spurred the Bulgarian national revival that led to independence and has remained influential over the centuries. After independence, the writings of Ivan Vazov (1850–1921), especially his 1894 novel *Under the Yoke*, helped define the national character and influenced other writers like Pencho Slaveykov and Aleko Konstantinov. Notable contemporary writers include the poet and novelist Blaga Dimitrova (1922–2003), who also served as Bulgaria’s prime minister in the early 1990s.<sup>89, 90</sup>

## Sports and Recreation

Soccer is the most popular sport in Bulgaria. In the 1994 FIFA World Cup, the national team led by star forward Hristo Stoichkov overcame tremendous odds to defeat the defending champions Germany and advance to the semifinal round. Bulgaria has achieved great international success in weight lifting, winning 36 Olympic medals and producing many world champions in the 1980s under the direction of innovative coach Ivan Abadjiev. Bulgarian wrestlers have won 69 Olympic medals. In the mid-2000s Bulgarians dominated the World Chess Championships, with Antoaneta Stefanova winning the women’s title in 2004 and Veselin Topalov winning the men’s title the following year. Other popular sports are tennis, boxing, and gymnastics.<sup>91, 92, 93, 94</sup>

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# Bulgaria in Perspective

## Chapter 4 | Society, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. Bulgaria's Roma minority has achieved cultural recognition and equality with the Bulgarian majority.  True  False
2. Bulgarian Muslims have maintained a relatively harmonious relationship with the rest of the country.  True  False
3. Bulgarians consume yogurt as a drink and an ingredient in various dishes.  True  False
4. Bulgarian-born environmental sculptor Christo was known for large-scale temporary installations in Europe and the United States.  True  False
5. Hristo Stoichkov led the Bulgarian men's national soccer team to the semifinals of the 1994 FIFA World Cup.  True  False

# Bulgaria in Perspective

## Chapter 4 | Society, Assessment Answers

1. False:  
The Roma minority is subject to harassment from non-Roma Bulgarians and marginalization from the government. They also experience significant discrimination, which has been demonstrated by nationalists in protests and demonstrations nationwide.
2. True:  
Bulgaria is home to the largest Muslim minority in any EU nation.
3. True:  
Bulgarians consume yogurt as a drink called *ayran* and often enjoy it as part of dishes like stuffed peppers and bean stew.
4. True:  
Christo rose to worldwide acclaim for elaborate temporary works like wrapping the Reichstag building in Berlin with fabric or installing 7,500 orange gates in New York City's Central Park.
5. True:  
The Bulgarian team overcame tremendous odds to defeat defending champions Germany in the quarterfinals.

## Chapter 5 | Security



Bulgarian troops in Afghanistan.  
Wikipedia / Commando busof

### Introduction

Since 1878, the modern state of Bulgaria has had to contend with the machinations of great powers like the Ottoman Empire and imperial and Soviet Russia. Bulgaria's ambition for territorial enlargement led to fraught relations with neighbors, ill-advised alliances, and military defeat in two world wars. After being a loyal Soviet satellite in the second half of the 20th century, Bulgaria sought to integrate into European and transatlantic institutions. Today the country is a member of NATO, and the European Union (EU), is a staunch military ally of the United States and generally enjoys warm and stable relations with its Balkan neighbors. The Bulgarian military is undergoing major modernization efforts while police reforms remain elusive. The persistence of corruption and a disregard for the rule of law threaten the government's legitimacy.<sup>1, 2, 3, 4, 5</sup>

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## U.S.-Bulgaria Relations

Diplomatic relations between the United States and Bulgaria go back to 1903; today, the two countries have a close and stable relationship. Bulgaria has emerged as a stalwart U.S. military ally in Eastern Europe. The United States uses several Bulgarian military facilities and conducts joint training with Bulgarian forces. Bilateral trade is thriving, having reached USD 412 million in the first half of 2019. Since 1991, the U.S.-accredited American University in Bulgaria has been providing liberal arts education to students from throughout southeastern Europe. In November 2019, Prime Minister Boyko Borissov had a cordial visit with President Donald Trump at the White House.<sup>6, 7, 8, 9</sup>

## Relations with Neighbors

### Romania

Bulgaria and Romania have strong bilateral relations going back to 1879. Starting in the 1990s, the two countries proceeded through the European integration process at the same pace, both joining NATO in 2004 and the EU in 2007. As EU members, they cooperate more closely with each other than with any other bloc member. Romania is among Bulgaria's top import and export partners. In 2017, bilateral trade reached USD 4.85 billion. The two countries are working to bolster their mutual transport and energy infrastructure. Priorities include increasing the number of bridges across the Danube border from the current two and expanding the capabilities of a natural gas pipeline between the two countries.<sup>10, 11, 12, 13</sup>

### Turkey

Despite a tumultuous history, Bulgaria and Turkey enjoy strong and close present-day relations. Turkey is one of Bulgaria's major non-EU trade partners. Turkish investments in Bulgaria amount to USD 2 billion, and some 1,500 Turkish companies operate in the country.<sup>14, 15, 16</sup>

In 2017, during the European migrant crisis, Bulgaria completed a razor-wire fence along its 223 km (139 mi) border with Turkey to avoid becoming part of the land route of Middle Eastern and Central Asian migrants to

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- 8 American University in Bulgaria, "About AUB," n.d., <https://www.aubg.edu/about-aubg>
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western Europe. Bulgaria also relies on its good relations with Turkey as a guarantee that Turkey will not allow migrants to make their way to the Bulgarian border.<sup>17, 18</sup>

Bulgaria is resistant to Turkey's overtures to ethnic Turks in former Ottoman lands, including the Turkish minority in Bulgaria. In the past, Turkey has provided financial support to Bulgaria's Grand Mufti, the spiritual leader of the country's Muslim community. Right-wing Bulgarian government officials have accused Turkey of attempting to influence Bulgarian politics through support of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, a Bulgarian political party dominated by ethnic Turks.<sup>19, 20, 21, 22</sup>

## Greece

Bulgaria has a positive and stable relationship with Greece. Greece was a strong supporter of Bulgaria's accession to NATO and the EU. Since 1989, Greece has been a significant investor in Bulgaria's economy. Tourism is a strong area for cooperation, as each country is a major tourist market for the other. Other common interests include collaboration within the EU and dealing with the flow of migrants moving west through the Balkans from Turkey.<sup>23, 24, 25</sup>

## North Macedonia

Bulgaria's complex relationship with North Macedonia is shaped by the common cultural and linguistic roots shared by the two countries. Bulgaria maintains that the Macedonian people are a subset of ethnic Bulgarians and that the Macedonian language is a Bulgarian dialect. North Macedonia sees the Bulgarian stance as an attempt at cultural dominance. Bulgaria was the first country to recognize Macedonian independence in 1992. Still, it is demanding a scaling back of Macedonian linguistic, ethnic, and historical claims and definitions before supporting North Macedonia's EU accession. A bilateral commission set up to sort out disputes surrounding the two countries' common history has been inactive since 2019.<sup>26, 27</sup> Both countries recognize the need to increase economic cooperation and have announced plans for a high-speed rail link between their capitals and for connecting their natural gas infrastructures.<sup>28</sup>

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## Serbia

Bulgaria and Serbia established diplomatic relations in 1879 and found common cause in their opposition to the Ottoman presence in the Balkans. After World War II, relations soured as Yugoslavia set out on an ideologically independent path while Bulgaria remained firmly under Soviet influence. Bulgaria also resented what it saw as Belgrade's attempt to strip Bulgarian traits from the language and culture of Macedonia, then a part of Yugoslavia. In recent decades, Bulgaria and Serbia have attempted to minimize differences and maximize cooperation. Bulgaria supports Serbia's bid to join the EU, and the two countries are exploring boosting bilateral transportation infrastructure, trade, and tourism. Bulgaria's 2008 recognition of Kosovo's independence continues to be a sore point in Belgrade.<sup>29, 30, 31, 32, 33</sup>

## Police

Law enforcement and public protection in Bulgaria fall under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The country's police force is structured into four directorates, for the national police, organized crime, border protection, and fire and civil protection. The national police force carries out investigations, operates detention facilities, and enforces traffic laws. It includes the gendarmerie, a special unit tasked with responding to riots and safeguarding buildings and infrastructure. Law enforcement personnel have the opportunity to earn various criminal justice degrees at the interior ministry's dedicated academy. In 2016, Bulgaria had nearly 24,000 police officers. The country's rate of 335 officers per 100,000 people is the 11th highest in the EU and above the EU average of 318 officers per 100,000 people.<sup>34, 35, 36</sup>

Bulgarian police are perceived as unreliable and have a reputation for corruption, impunity, and excessive use of force. The police force's lack of transparency with the public dates back to the communist era. In the chaotic post-communist years, the police often became associated with enabling and protecting organized crime. In day-to-day operations, traffic police officers are seen as highly susceptible to being bribed. A series of police reforms over the years have done little to improve the force's reputation.<sup>37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42</sup> In January 2019, five police officers

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were arrested for extortion of small business owners in Sofia.<sup>43</sup> The following year, three high ranking anti-drug officers were arrested on suspicion of accepting bribes from drug-trafficking rings.<sup>44</sup>

The State Agency for National Security protects Bulgaria's national interests. Its tasks include counterintelligence, safeguarding national sovereignty against unconstitutional activities, briefing high-level national security officials, and protecting classified information. The agency has a financial intelligence directorate that focuses on combatting money laundering and the financing of terrorism.<sup>45</sup>

## Military

Bulgaria's military strength was ranked 49th out of 137 countries in a 2019 survey.<sup>46</sup> The armed forces consist of the army, navy, and air force. There are approximately 31,000 active-duty military personnel, with 20,000 reservists. Military service is voluntary, with 18 as the minimum age of enlistment; conscription ended in 2008.<sup>47</sup> <sup>48</sup>In 2010 the defense ministry opened all military jobs to women, who make up some 14% of the armed forces.<sup>49</sup>

Bulgaria's land forces equipment strength consists of 710 tanks, 2,000 armored vehicles, 506 self-propelled artillery pieces, 350 towed artillery pieces, and 192 rocket launchers. Naval forces consist of four frigates, three corvettes, four patrol vessels, and 18 mine warfare vessels. Air force strength consists of 13 fighter jets, four dedicated attack aircraft, five transport aircraft, 20 training aircraft, 25 helicopters, and two attack helicopters.<sup>50</sup>

Bulgaria's military is undergoing major modernization and integration with its European counterparts and NATO. In 2019, Bulgaria's defense spending amounted to USD 2.1 billion, or 3.25% of GDP, significantly higher than the 2% spending target agreed upon by NATO members. From 2018 to 2019, Bulgaria had a 127% increase in military spending, the highest such jump in spending for any country during that time.<sup>51, 52, 53</sup>

Bulgaria was first spurred out of its post-communist military stagnation when it joined NATO in 2004. The boost in defense spending gained urgency in 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea and involvement in the war in eastern Ukraine. U.S.- or European-made tanks, fighter jets, and other weapons and equipment are gradually replacing outdated and malfunctioning Soviet-era stockpiles. The modernization efforts include the acquisition of

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150 armored vehicles from European manufacturers and the upgrading of two naval vessels. The most notable investment has been a USD 1.67 billion deal with the United States for eight F-16 Block 70 fighter jets.<sup>54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59</sup>

## Cybersecurity

Bulgaria's cybersecurity is overseen by the National Coordination and Organizational Network for Cyber/ICT Security (NKOMKS). This body comprises relevant public and private agencies and organizations and is responsible for coordinating the prevention of and response to cyber incidents. Within NKOMKS, the National Cybersecurity Coordinator is responsible for developing a national cybersecurity strategy.<sup>60</sup> Bulgaria is part of a NATO program that assists member states in bolstering cybersecurity. In 2018, Bulgaria passed a legal framework for addressing cybersecurity incidents.<sup>61</sup>

Bulgaria's cybersecurity vulnerability was made evident in June 2019 when a massive data breach at the national tax agency resulted in the theft of the tax information of as many as five million Bulgarians. The breach is considered the largest known theft of personal information in the Balkans. Investigators detained two computer programmers from Sofia as the likely suspects. Observers point out that the authorities' focus on preventing sensational cybersecurity incidents like foreign interference and attacks against infrastructure may have led to the neglect of more commonplace threats like data breaches and identity theft.<sup>62, 63, 64, 65</sup>

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## Issues Affecting Stability

Corruption has been a stubborn presence in the Bulgarian state for decades, hampering progress and undermining legitimacy. The murky ties between government elites and oligarchs are often described as “state capture” (when policy is crafted in secret) or a “mafia-style” state. The collusion is occasionally visible in the form of crony political appointments, flagrant misuse of state funds and resources, and the refusal of the judiciary to investigate credible allegations of high-level graft. An estimated 35% of government procurement contracts involve corruption. Corrupt practices have been endemic in governments led by both the center-left Socialists and the center-right GERB, the two main political parties. As of July 2020, no high-level officials had been prosecuted or jailed for corruption-related charges.<sup>66, 67, 68, 69</sup>

Since joining the EU in 2007, Bulgaria has consistently ranked among the bloc’s most corrupt members. In 2008, the EU issued sharp criticism of corruption in Bulgaria and blocked USD 765 million in aid funds.<sup>70, 71, 72</sup> In 2017, two former central bank governors were among 17 people indicted for embezzling USD 1.51 billion, including public funds, in a scheme that led to the 2014 collapse of a major bank.<sup>73, 74, 75</sup>

Ahmed Dogan, a power broker and high-level member of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms party, and Delyan Peevski, a media mogul and member of parliament, have become emblematic of the toxic links between the government and vested interests. In July 2020, an anti-corruption political activist was physically denied access to a public Black Sea beach adjacent to Dogan’s summer residence. It emerged that both Dogan and Peevski had been receiving protection from the secret service. The government was initially dismissive of the allegations and responded by arresting two officials close to Bulgaria’s president, a rival and critic of Prime Minister Borisov. The developments brought thousands of people onto the streets of Sofia and other cities to denounce the disregard for the rule of law.<sup>76, 77, 78, 79, 80</sup> Facing calls for his resignation, Borisov fired four key government ministers.<sup>81</sup>

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## Water Security

Despite its abundance of rivers, Bulgaria lacks water security. Bulgaria has access to 2,250 cubic m (79,458 cubic ft) of water resources per person per year, significantly below the global average of 8,000 cubic m (282,517 cubic ft) per person per year.<sup>82, 83</sup> Bulgaria relies on dams to supply water for drinking and industry. Most of the country's dams were built during the communist era, and many are in disrepair. Dry weather and government mismanagement of water resources have led the water levels at least five dam reservoirs to fall below normal levels. In late 2019 the city of Pernik, southwest of Sofia, experienced a water crisis after the reservoir of the nearby Studena dam dried up. The city's 82,000 residents had their access to running water reduced to six hours per day.<sup>84, 85, 86, 87, 88</sup>

## Outlook

Bulgaria's accession to NATO and the EU has brought much-needed doses of security and stability. The country sees its military alliances with Western Europe and the United States as shields against Russian ambitions in the Balkans. Despite European integration, Bulgaria's successive governments, regardless of political affiliation, remain mired in allegations of corruption. This disregard for the rule of law, combined with poor governmental performance and the recent lackluster response to the COVID-19 crisis, is likely to continue to spur the Bulgarian people to take to the streets to demand justice, accountability, and reform.<sup>89, 90, 91</sup>

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# Bulgaria in Perspective

## Chapter 5 | Security, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. Bulgaria and Turkey continue to harbor mutual animosity dating back to Ottoman rule in the Balkans.  True  False
2. Bulgarian police are perceived as unreliable and have a reputation for corruption, impunity, and excessive use of force.  True  False
3. In 2019, Russian government hackers perpetrated a major cyberattack against Bulgaria.  True  False
4. High-level corruption is associated mainly with Bulgaria's center-left Socialist party.  True  False
5. The Bulgarian people have come to accept government corruption as a fact of life.  True  False



# Bulgaria in Perspective

## Chapter 5 | Security, Assessment Answers

1. False:  
Despite a tumultuous history, Bulgaria and Turkey enjoy strong present-day relations. Turkey is one of Bulgaria's major non-EU trade partners.
2. True:  
The police force's lack of transparency with the public can be traced back to the communist era. A series of police reforms have been ineffective in improving the force's reputation.
3. False:  
A massive data breach did occur in 2019, resulting in the theft of tax information from as many as five million Bulgarians. However, investigators arrested two computer programmers from Sofia as the likely suspects.
4. False:  
Corrupt practices have been endemic in governments led by Bulgaria's two main political parties, the center-left Socialists and the center-right GERB.
5. False:  
In July 2020, fresh revelations of government corruption inspired thousands to protest in Bulgarian cities, demanding the government's resignation and respect for the rule of law.

# Bulgaria in Perspective

## Further Readings and Resources

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# Bulgaria in Perspective

## Final Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. The unique convergence of microclimates on the Balkan Peninsula has created a year-round desert-like climate in most of Bulgaria.  True  False
2. Ancient Bulgaria was dominated by Thracians, Greeks, and Romans.  True  False
3. Bulgaria is a major European player in the manufacturing of automobile parts.  True  False
4. The Bulgarian language is closely related to Romanian and Hungarian.  True  False
5. Bulgaria maintains that the Macedonian people are a subset of ethnic Bulgarians and that the Macedonian language is a Bulgarian dialect.  True  False
6. Bulgaria's capital Sofia is rapidly approaching megacity status with a population of just over nine million.  True  False
7. The Turkish yoke was an innovative farming implement introduced into the Balkan Peninsula from Asia Minor in the 14th century.  True  False
8. Wind power is the most widely used source of renewable electricity in Bulgaria.  True  False

9. During the communist era, the leaders of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church steadfastly refused to cooperate with government authorities. Poland was partitioned for a final time upon the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990.  True  False
10. Bulgaria's military is undergoing modernization and integration with its European counterparts and NATO.  True  False
11. Russia's declaration of war against the Ottomans led to Bulgarian autonomy in 1878.  True  False
12. Bulgaria's Black Sea coast is dominated by communist-era steel and petrochemical plants that have marred the region's former natural beauty.  True  False
13. Varna and Burgas are the two most prominent cities on Bulgaria's Black Sea coast.  True  False
14. Rakia is Bulgaria's national drink, distilled from various fruit such as grapes, plums, or apricots. Poland's Jewish population dropped from 3 million to 300,000–600,000 after the events of World War II.  True  False
15. Murky ties between Bulgarian government elites and oligarchs are often described as “state capture” or a “mafia-style” state.  True  False
16. Water pollution is a major problem in the Danube River.  True  False
17. A fascist group briefly seized power in Bulgaria in the 1930s.  True  False
18. EU-mandated structural and economic reforms have reduced Bulgaria's poverty to a statistically insignificant rate.  True  False

19. A law prohibiting women from officially owning property is an antiquated carryover from Bulgaria's first constitution.  True  False
20. Delyan Peevski is a former Olympic bodybuilder who has become an ardent anticorruption political activist.  True  False
21. Bulgaria is seismically active due to the Balkan Peninsula's location on a tectonic plate boundary.  True  False
22. Todor Zhivkov led an anti-communist Bulgarian government-in-exile in the mid-20th century.  True  False
23. Bulgaria's labor force is experiencing a surplus of skilled laborers, driving up unemployment statistics.  True  False
24. The *chagla* is a violin-like instrument that accompanies the complex polyphonic vocal harmonies of traditional Bulgarian folk music.  True  False
25. Despite its abundance of rivers, Bulgaria lacks water security.  True  False

# Bulgaria in Perspective

## Final Assessment Answers

1. False:  
Bulgaria's climate is temperate-continental with distinct seasons. The average annual rainfall reaches around 700 mm (27.5 in).
2. True:  
Thracians arrived in the region during the Bronze Age (3000–1200 BCE) and reached their peak in the sixth century BCE. Alexander the Great expanded into the region in the fourth century BCE. In the first century CE, the Romans conquered the region and created the provinces of Moesia and Thrace.
3. True:  
Some 150 auto parts companies employ over 40,000 workers throughout the country, about 1% of the total workforce. About 90% of the airbag sensors for the European auto market are produced in Bulgaria.
4. False:  
The Bulgarian language belongs to the South Slavic group of languages, which also includes Slovene and Serbo-Croatian; the language is also closely related to Macedonian.
5. True:  
Bulgaria's complex relationship with North Macedonia is shaped by their shared cultural and linguistic roots. North Macedonia sees the Bulgarian stance as an attempt at cultural dominance.
6. False:  
While it is Bulgaria's largest city and capital, Sofia's population is approximately 1.28 million—a fraction of what qualifies as a megacity.
7. False:  
The term "Turkish yoke" refers to the generally oppressive, nearly five-centuries-long rule of the Ottoman Empire in Bulgaria starting in 1396.
8. False:  
The most widely used renewable energy source in Bulgaria is hydropower, with 242 hydropower plants supplying about 14% of overall energy.
9. False:  
Despite its popularity, the church's reputation has been tainted by revelations that many of its leaders acted as informants for the secret police during the communist era.
10. True:  
U.S.- or European-made tanks, fighter jets, and other weapons and equipment are gradually replacing Bulgaria's outdated and malfunctioning Soviet-era stockpiles.

11. True:  
Bulgarians enthusiastically joined the Russo-Turkish War and helped soundly defeat the Turks.
12. False:  
The Black Sea coast is Bulgaria's main tourist attraction, referred to as the Bulgarian Riviera. The coast is dotted with quaint seaside resorts offering beach access and attractive amenities at affordable prices.
13. True:  
Varna is Bulgaria's largest seaport and home to the country's navy. Burgas is a major Black Sea port and administrative center.
14. True:  
*Rakia* is commonly served during meals, usually dinner.
15. True:  
Collusion is occasionally observed in the form of crony political appointments, flagrant misuse of state funds and resources, and the refusal of the judiciary to investigate credible allegations of high-level graft.
16. True:  
The Danube is plagued by pollution from heavy metals, pharmaceutical substances, and pesticides. The fish population in the Danube and its tributaries has diminished by 60% since 1999.
17. True:  
A fascist group called Zveno seized power in a coup in 1934. Zveno's ambitions were curtailed in 1935, however, when Tsar Boris III established a royal dictatorship.
18. False:  
Bulgaria is the poorest country in the European Union. Approximately 22% of Bulgaria's population live in poverty, with the poverty line at USD 201.87 per month.
19. False:  
Despite patriarchal traditions, women in modern Bulgaria commonly hold equal responsibility or otherwise have substantial authority in their families and households. Men and women both have the right to own property and vote.
20. False:  
Delyan Peevski is a media tycoon and member of the Bulgarian parliament who has become emblematic of the toxic links between the government and vested interests. In July 2020, it was revealed that Peevski was inexplicably receiving protection from the secret service.
21. True:  
In August 1986, a 6.9 magnitude earthquake struck Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia. Bulgaria's vulnerability to earthquakes is heightened by the poor building practices and regulations of the communist and early post-communist eras.



22. False:  
Todor Zhivkov emerged as Bulgaria's communist leader in the late 1950s. His long rule saw the implementation of mild reforms and an emphasis on heavy industry and consumer goods.
23. False:  
Bulgaria is experiencing a pronounced labor shortage, especially in highly skilled fields like chemical and electrical engineering. Despite the shortage, Bulgaria's unemployment rate hit a seven-year low of 4.3% in 2019.
24. False:  
*Chagla* is a popular present-day pop music subgenre that fuses Balkan, Middle Eastern, and flamenco styles and comes packaged in flashy music videos.
25. True:  
Bulgaria relies on dams to supply water for drinking and industry, but many of its dams are in disrepair. Dry weather and government mismanagement of water resources have resulted in the water levels of at least five reservoirs to fall below normal levels.