



Building Bulgaria

An Interview with His Excellency Boyko Borisov,
Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria



His Excellency Boyko Borisov

Scientific Research, where he obtained his Ph.D. He left the ministry in 1990. In September 2001, he was appointed Chief Secretary of the interior ministry and was promoted to Colonel. In 2002, he was promoted to Major General and two years later to Lieutenant General. He stepped down as Chief Secretary in August 2005 to win the pre-term mayoral election in Sofia in October. He was re-elected to the post at the regular local government elections in 2007. Borisov established his center-right party, Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) in December 2006.

Bulgaria, like the majority of countries in Eastern Europe, has been affected by the economic crisis. How were you impacted and what policies has your government implemented in order to overcome the economic and financial crisis?

What particular solutions have you obtained?

The crisis impacted every country in the world. But we implemented many anti-crisis measures.

The first thing we did was to keep the taxes as they were; we never raised taxes and we currently have the lowest taxes in Europe. We have a 10 percent flat income tax and a flat corporate tax, and 20 percent VAT.

Your government has been committed to developing new economic priorities, consolidating Bulgaria's European agenda, and promoting regional issues. What are the major achievements and in what areas would you still like to see more done?

Bulgaria ranks second in terms of the lowest foreign debt and fourth in terms of the lowest budget deficit. At the same time, we made public investments in infrastructure projects. One speed motorway, Lyulin, has already been completed and six others are being constructed as we speak. Next year, in April, we are coming out with our biggest project for the Sofia subway: the speed motorway from Sofia to the Black Sea coast, Trake. In July 2011, we will open a brand new sports facility accommodating 20,000 spectators. And this is all happening along with our increasing the use rate of the European funds by 20 times compared to the previous government. We've achieved very positive results by investing additional funds in agriculture. The margin in terms of grain production between import and export is about one billion.

What do you see ahead from an economic point of view?

The economy is beginning to gain momentum and I hope that this trend will remain. For example, just a couple of days ago, we opened a project of the American company AES amounting to 1.2 billion euros. It's an electric power plant.

Your government has launched major reforms in public and private sectors such as tackling corruption and modernizing diplomatic services. What are some of the major achievements of these policies?

In terms of diplomatic service, 22 years after democracy came about, more than 50 percent of Bulgarian diplomats in the biggest capitals in the world were agents of the former secret services and we recalled them. And we were first to fully declassify all their files. We focused on economic solutions that would bring revenues to the country and investment in the production sector increased sharply. I expect this trend to continue and the investments to increase, given the fact that we now have submitted the amendments to the constitution – and we expect Parliament to pass them – according to which the so-called financial stability pact will be adopted and it will make it constitutionally

EDITORS' NOTE Sofia Mayor Boyko Borisov was sworn in as Prime Minister of Bulgaria on July 27, 2009. In 1982, he graduated from the Higher Specialized School of the Ministry of the Interior in Sofia with an engineering degree in Firefighting Equipment and Safety and a rank of lieutenant. That same year, Borisov joined the interior ministry, serving first as Platoon Commander and then as Company Commander at the fire department of the ministry's Sofia city directorate. In 1985, he became a lecturer at the interior ministry's Higher Institute for Officer Training and



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mandatory for every subsequent government to not exceed the 3 percent deficit.

We have also adopted the new law on renewable energy sources – green energy – and the political Nabucco pipeline agreement was recently signed in Turkey, which helps in the diversification of gas suppliers.

In addition, I recently went to Romania and, together with the Prime Minister Boc, opened a modern state-of-the-art factory for the production of car batteries – this is a Bulgarian investment in Romania. The cooperation between the two countries is exemplary. One example is the construction of the second bridge

over the Danube – this is a European project financed by European funds and it is a key project for both countries in terms of transportation networks.

You mentioned renewable energy. In terms of the recent crisis in Japan and the debate regarding nuclear energy throughout the world, how does this affect the thinking of the Bulgarian government about the nuclear investments that the country is planning?

Our nuclear power plant, Kozloduy, has been inspected 24 times. We are constantly doing stress tests to see how the nuclear power plant

will pass. In terms of the Belene nuclear power plant, which has yet to be built, we intend to meet all the new requirements for safety and security that are expected to be issued in a couple of weeks. We put safety first.

What role has Bulgaria found inside the European house? How does your country take part in reaching the goals of the greater European family, while promoting Bulgaria's national agenda?

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Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov with German Chancellor Angela Merkel (top left) and NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen (above)

and NATO, and with the U.S. as well, trying to reach our common goals. There are two military bases in Bulgaria that are being used by the American army and we are a very reliable partner.

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Russia and Turkey are two important regional players in southeastern Europe and the Black Sea region, but also strategic in the relationship with the European Union. What role can Bulgaria play in strengthening regional cooperation and in advising the EU on how to deal with these countries?

I wouldn't say Bulgaria can advise the European Union. Also, the EU has excellent bilateral relations with both Turkey and Russia and I do not think that our geostrategic location gives us any advantage in the relations with these countries. This is why our foreign policy is being formulated and implemented inline and fully synchronized with our Euro-Atlantic partners. Our relations with both countries are very friendly, pragmatic, and quite normal.

What aspects or lessons from your previous experience in the private sector and in local public administration have offered you a basis for your national administration policies in a time of crisis and as a part of the globalization process?

I have a private sector background and that's why I know the problems and concerns of business, and I'm trying to find the solutions together with the business sector.

The five years during which I was the Secretary General of the Ministry of Interior helped me know who is who in the country. The five years during which I was the Mayor of the biggest city in the country – the capital – gave me administrative and economic experience, and a social background. I'm well prepared for what I'm doing and the fact that I am a former athlete also helped me a lot. The fact that I know what sports is all about made Bulgaria attractive, especially now when we have this new sport facility. The ski World Cup was once held here and will be held again in Bulgaria. We also have a Chess World Tournament as well as different European and World championships taking place in the country.

Outside of your work as Prime Minister, what hobbies do you practice? Which people have influenced your way of thinking?

Being a former athlete, I have built a strong character, but at the same time I am tolerant of the opponent and, of course, I'm always vying for a win.



Prime Minister Borisov greets Alex Serban, LEADERS Director and Editor-Central Europe and Eurasia Division, prior to this interview.

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The fact that I have a Ph.D. made it possible for me to establish good contacts with very prominent scientists and I've learned something from each of these scientists, as well as the athletes I have met.

Bulgaria is holding Presidential elections later this year. What should be the major objectives of the next head of state of Bulgaria and what kind of person is best suited for this job?

First, because the head of state unifies the nation, this person should be strong. I can't give any recommendations to the future president, because I will run not in these but in the next Presidential elections. Until then, I will work to complete my infrastructure projects.

There is a new generation of leaders taking up responsibilities in your government. Young generations of political

and business leaders are facing challenges around the world. What words of advice from your experience in leadership can you offer to the next generation of people who will be taking the projects further?

Bulgaria is very similar to the U.S. in that regard. I am a self-made man and I've moved through all the steps in the social and political hierarchy on my own, without anybody's help. I started as a firefighter, then I obtained my Ph.D., and after that, I went into private business, became Secretary General of the Ministry of Interior, Mayor of Sofia, and after that, Prime Minister and President of the largest party in Bulgaria that won five consecutive elections. This speaks to the fact that if you are ambitious and if you follow your ambitions, even on your own without anybody else's help, you have a 100 percent chance to get to the top. That is what democracy is all about. ●