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Qatari Prime Minister Visits Bulgaria

Sofia - Eight documents for cooperation between Bulgaria and Qatar were signed in the presence of Prime Minister Boyko Borissov and Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jasim binJabir Al Thani, BTA reported Thursday.

The documents include a Memorandum of Agreement in Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fishery, another in the field of health care, a Memorandum of Agreement between InvestBulgaria Agency and Qatari Diar company, a memorandum between the Bulgarian government and the Qatar Mining company, as well as between the Ministry of Economy and Katara Hospitality.



Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jasim bin Jabir Al Than (left) and Prime Minister Boyko Borissov *BTA Photo*

The governments of the two countries also signed a Cooperation Agreement and a Framework Agreement for investments. Hassad Food and Gradus 1 companies also signed a memorandum of understanding.

A schedule will be developed within one month for work on the implementation of the bilateral projects.

Qatar will deposit 200 million dollars with the Bulgarian central bank, the Qatari Prime Minister said after his talks with Bulgarian counterpart Boyko Borissov. He congratulated Borissov for the speed with which the spheres of cooperation were mapped out. This has helped the two countries to map out the future projects of cooperation between them, he added. Qatar will send at least three teams of specialists to discuss projects in the field of agriculture, tourism and health care.

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8th World Meeting of Bulgarian Media Opens in Bucharest

Bucharest - The 8th World Meeting of Bulgarian Media opened at the Military Club in the Romanian capital Bucharest on Thursday with addresses by Bulgarian News Agency (BTA) Director General Maxim Minchev and Sofia Mayor Yordanka Fandakova, among others.



Minchev said the event has brought together journalists working for over 50 Bulgarian media around the globe.

The World Meetings of Bulgarian Media are organized by BTA and the Association of Bulgarian Media Abroad. The current meeting is discussing changes in the Bulgarian and international media environment over the last year, ways in which Bulgarian expatriate communities and their media are coping with various aspects of the economic crisis, the regional functions of the media and the global challenges facing them. Special emphasis will be laid on the specific characteristics of the regional media in Bulgaria and the conditions in which they operate.

Fandakova, who is a guest at the forum for the third time, said: "The Bulgarian media in any part of the world encourage people to pay attention to intellectual values." The Sofia Mayor noted that the World Meetings are a

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French Senators Visit Bulgaria

Sofia - A delegation of the European Affairs Committee of the French Senate headed by Committee Chairman Simon Sutour opened Thursday a two-day visit to Bulgaria. The French guests first met with National Assembly Chairperson Tsetska Tsacheva and MPs on the EU Affairs and EU Funds Supervision Committee, the Bulgarian Parliament said in a press release.

The talks focused on Bulgaria's accession to the Schengen Area, the EU's economic and financial policy, the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) applied with regard to Bulgaria, and cooperation between the two countries' national assemblies.

Chairperson of the EU Affairs and EU Funds Supervision Committee Monica Panayotova thanked for the revised French position about Bulgaria's accession to the Schengen Area and voiced a hope that a final solution on the issue will be reached in September.

The French officials said that Bulgaria's joining the Schengen Area should not be tied with the country's assessment under CVM.

Later on Thursday the French delegation conferred with Deputy Foreign Minister Ivan Naidenov. Naidenov said, quoted by the Foreign Ministry, that a new boost should be given to the political dialogue and the cooperation between Bulgaria and France, both in terms of bilateral relations and within the EU.

Naidenov highlighted the key priorities of Bulgaria:



Tsetska Tsacheva and Simon Sutour (left)

BTA Photo

joining the Schengen Area, the Cohesion Policy of the EU, the Common Agricultural Policy, and the position vis-a-vis the multi-year budget framework of the EU.

Sutour said that France will continue to support Bulgaria's bid to join the Schengen Area. He said that assistance provided under the Cohesion Fund should not be reduced and urged for better balance in the distribution of funds by regions.

On Friday the guests continue their visit with a trip to Bulgaria's second-largest city Plovdiv to meet with Mayor Ivan Totev and the local Orthodox Church leader, Metropolitan Nikolai. □

Parliament Bans Smoking in Indoor Public Places

Sofia - Parliament Thursday banned conclusively smoking in indoor public places by amending the Health Act. The ban becomes effective from June 1, 2012.

As an exception, smoking will be allowed in special designated areas in airports. Such areas will be required to meet special standards and will be off-limit for minors.

The MPs voted down a proposal by the Left to allow no exception.

Parliament also banned smoking on playgrounds and stadiums, outdoors sports facilities, open-air cinemas and theatres, during sport and cultural events with admission charge. The ban spreads to the adjoining areas and sidewalks out-

side kindergartens, creches, schools, student dormitories and facilities providing social services for children.

Smoking is allowed on bus stops.

Violating the fine will be fined 300 to 500 leva (500 to 1,000 leva for repeat offenders). The fine for sole traders is 1,000 to 1,500 leva (1,500 to 3,000 leva for repeat offence) and for legal entities between 3,000 and 5,000 leva (up to 10,000 leva for repeat offenders).

The ban will be enforced by inspectors of the Health Inspectorates or by the Health Ministry.

MP Lyuben Kornezov (Left) said during the debates that Bulgaria will lose 230 million leva a

year and 18,000 jobs. "Businesses have invested 50 million leva for remodeling restaurants and cafes to meet the previous smoking regulations. Who will pay it back to them," he asked.

Peter Petrov (GERB) said that the only ones on the losing end are cigarette producers. Volen Siderov (Ataka) commented that the ban will not end smoking and will only make smokers avoid the non-smoking areas. Remzi Osman (Movement for Rights and Freedoms) said that even though he quit smoking three years ago, he cannot understand why there should not be separate smoking and non-smoking areas in restaurants and bars, or smoking-only places. □

President Plevneliev: "You Don't Buy Growth, You Work for It"

BTA correspondent Nikolai Petrov

Seattle

The second day of the working visit to the United States by Bulgarian President Rosen Plevneliev on Wednesday was dominated by meetings with business people in Seattle, including representatives of Google, Facebook, Microsoft and Amazon.

He attended a working breakfast entitled "US-Bulgaria: Building Bridges through Business", with some 50 representatives from IT and information infrastructure companies. At a roundtable, the President discussed with Google, Facebook, Microsoft and Amazon representatives, among others, the opportunities for developing innovation ecosystems.

Plevneliev said at the meeting that "you don't buy [economic] growth - you work for it and don't waste money", and described Bulgaria as "an island of stability amid a crisis". He said his country is "a good option for doing business" and used statistics to prove his statement, and urged potential US partners to grab the opportunity and built on the basis of this stability.

The President said that Bulgaria has done a lot to make the business environment more friendly for foreign investment. More changes due later this year aim to further reduce the administrative burden and introduce a one-stop-shop system in administrative services. It means that submitting the requisite documents with the InvestBulgaria Agency will be enough to get started and complete fast the procedure for

obtaining all permits and licences, he explained.

Plevneliev also said that Bulgaria will make sure to provide incentives for investments in sectors with an immediate impact on the Bulgarian strategy for development until 2020, including new and innovative technologies and infrastructure.

The President said further than Bulgaria can ensure its independence in meeting its natural gas needs because the Black Sea shelf has natural gas deposits which are believed to be enough to meet demand for 30 years to come. He was adamant that US companies can find in Bulgaria breeding ground in the development of the energy sector, in diversification of the energy sources, the measures for energy efficiency.

In his remarks at the working breakfast, US Ambassador to Bulgaria James Warlick said that many misconceptions exist in respect of Bulgaria and these must be overcome. One is that there is much crime and corruption in Bulgaria. There certainly is some, but these has been a positive trend and the streets in Bulgaria now are much safer than they were, he added. Another cliché is that the infrastructure in Bulgaria is inadequate but there, too, things are making progress and some infrastructural sectors - notably Internet - are very well developed, the diplomat said. A third misconception concerns the human capital: many years ago the best researchers and engineers came from Bulgaria and now there is a revival in people's interest to develop and become qualified and skillful. □

Qatari Prime Minister Visits Bulgaria

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The Qatari Prime Minister declared he is proud of his friendship with his Bulgarian counterpart and sees in him a responsible person. He also expressed hope to convince everyone in Qatar that there is a country called Bulgarian in which they can invest and that the resulting number of investors will promote relations between the two countries. Hamad bin Jasim bin Jabir Al Thani also said he hoped to witness the launch of all projects even this year.

Borissov said that the agreements

signed are "a huge chance" for the Bulgarian businesses and for the development of farming, tourism and health care. He said that "there is now guaranteed market" for Bulgarian lamb, beef and chicken, as well an opportunity for setting up joint ventures for the production of honey and sheep breeding.

The Qatari PM promised to provide 350,000 euros in sponsorship to the Tournament of Champions event of the Women's Tennis Association in Sofia, Borissov said.

Borissov said that he invited his Qatari counterpart to invest in the construction of a model hospital in

Bulgaria.

The two prime ministers said that the trilateral meeting between them and the prime minister of Turkey scheduled for Friday will discuss the situation in Syria, among other topics. The Qatari Prime Minister said that the question about Syria is very important and that "killing of people continues there despite the negotiations". "We are related by blood with the Syrian people and for us it is important to find a way out of the crisis," Hamad bin Jasim bin Jabir Al Thani said. He urged the incumbents in Syria to listen to the voice of wisdom. □

Evtim Kostadinov Re-elected as Secret Files Committee Chairman

Sofia - Evtim Kostadinov was re-elected as the Chairman of the Com-



mittee for Disclosing Documents and Announcing Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to State Security and the Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian People's Army (also known as 'the secret files committee'). A total of 134 MPs supported Evtimov, who was nominated by GERB. The GERB nominated members are Ekaterina Boncheva, Ivanka Vitanova and Orhan Ismailov. The previous committee's term expired on April 5. Ayrush Hadji was elected as Deputy Chairman, nominated by the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), with 135 votes. Mariana Darakchieva from the Union of Democratic Forces was elected Secretary by 140 MPs.

The political parties nominated a total of ten candidates. Only Valeri

Koutsanov - one of the two Blue Coalition nominees, did not win support. He garnered 17 votes, with four against and 92 abstentions.

The Coalition for Bulgaria nominated Apostol Dimitrov and Georgi Pangarov as members of the Committee. Boris Mihaylov was nominated by the MRF.

Luchozar Toshev from the Blue Coalition objected to the new Committee, basing his objection on Kostadinov's past as a captain in the People's Militia during Bulgaria's totalitarian regime. Toshev said that this is the reason for the previous committee's failure to be accepted as a member of the European Platform for Memory and Conscience. □

Finance Minister Djankov: Solid Investor Is Interested in OCK-Kurdjali

Kurdjali, Southern Bulgaria - A solid investor has shown interest in the Lead and Zinc Complex (OCK) in Kurdjali, Southern Bulgaria, said the regional administration, quoting Finance Minister Simeon Djankov in a phone conversation from the US to Kurdjali Regional Governor Ivanka Taushanova. The investor is still interested and the government expects OCK owner Valentin Zahariev to be more active so that an agreement is reached.

Minister Djankov said that it was not in the interest of creditor banks and Zahariev if the company were declared insolvent. Through mediation on the part of the government, the positions of the stakeholders about the future of the OCK have grown closer and this a serious step towards a positive outcome, said Djankov. Economy Minister Delyan Dobrev is set to attend a meeting with the creditor banks on Thursday.

In a statement released to the media Thursday, the Confederation of the Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB) calls for urgent negotiations between creditor banks and the owner through the mediation of Economy Minister Delyan Dobrev and Finance Minister Simeon Djankov for swift resolution of the impasse at OCK.

OCK workers were mistrustful of Djankov's promise for an investor as no name has been given. Workers said Zahariev was irresponsible in putting off negotiations with creditor banks. The future of the works and keeping over 500 jobs have been put aside, CITUB said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Boyko Borissov met with CITUB President Plamen Dimitrov in connection with the situation at OCK, CITUB said in a press release.

At the meeting Borissov said he and the government are committed to a speedy completion of the negotiations with OCK's creditor banks and designation of the new investor in the plant "in a matter of days".

Dimitrov expressed the protesters' determination not to allow declaring OCK bankrupt or liquidated.

Borissov said that an agreement has been reached with the owners of two companies, Gorubso in Madan, and KCM in Plovdiv, to provide temporary work to OCK employees who want such work until a new investor steps in the Kurdjali plant.

The Prime Minister said that transport will be provided to the OCK workers who want to take up the opportunity to work in either Gorubso or KCM.

Protests by OCK workers at a tent camp have gone into their fifth day. Over 8,000 signatures in support of their demands have been collected.

On Wednesday another two workers began a hunger strike over unpaid wages, thus bringing the total number to four. Regional authorities have provided them with a room where they can continue the strike. Stefan Atanassov, who went on hunger strike on May 14, gave it up on Thursday after his condition deteriorated. The other three workers are determined to go on. □

8th World Meeting of Bulgarian Media Opens in Bucharest

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positive example of cooperation between cities, particularly the capital cities in united Europe. The current meeting in Bucharest signifies the common priorities for sustainable regions, she said. Sofia and Bucharest cooperated successfully last year, Fandakova said, citing specifically two conferences: one on the EU's cohesion policy in 2014-2020, and the other on the European capitals of culture.

The Sofia Mayor underscored the great power of fast and accurate information and the importance of civic participation in addressing the problems of cities. "One cause which I think can unite the citizens and the power-holders is Sofia's bid to become European Capital of Culture in 2019," she said.

"Besides being a source of news and offering a critical perspective on events, I believe the media also have another key role to play: they are an important factor, along with schools, for promoting the intellect as a social value," Fandakova said.

Bulgaria's Council on Electronic Media Chairman Georgi Lozanov greeted the guests as a participant in all eight World Meetings so far. He said these meetings are unique events because they enable journalists to become a close-knit community. "Self-protection and solidarity are reliable guarantees for freedom of the media, and it is only at these meetings that we can have a close

look at each other. The civic forms of the media are no longer as important as they were before Bulgaria joined the EU, and therefore these meetings have a mission, and they live up to it," Lozanov said. He noted that the stronger the journalistic community, the better it can resist external influences.

According to Lozanov, national identity nowadays is not bound by the notion of territory, because "Bulgaria is all over the world," and the media play an essential role in this. "I am glad that this year the 8th World Meeting of Bulgarian Media is dedicated to the regional aspect of communication and offers an opportunity

for a profound debate on who we are," he said.

The guests at the meeting include lawmakers, politicians, diplomats, mayors, media professionals, and publishers. They were greeted by musician Dani Milev with the theme song from the television series "Hushove" and by the Naiden Kirov Dance Theatre.

The seven previous World Meetings of Bulgarian Media, held since 2005 in Sofia, Chicago, Rome, Madrid, Varna/Bourgas, Vienna, and Amsterdam, have been events of national significance and great public impact and publicity in Bulgaria and abroad.

An exhibition featuring the Bulgarian press of the National Revival Period (18th-19th century) opened at the National Library in Bucharest in the sidelines of the World Meeting of Bulgarian Media. BTA Director General Maxim Minchev described the exhibition as an expression of "homage and gratitude to Romania." He recalled that during the National Revival, Romania was home to exiled Bulgarian revolutionaries and their news media and cultural institutions, which formed the backbone of the intellectual life of new Bulgaria.

Sofia's National Library Director Boryana Hristova said 38 out of 90 Bulgarian periodicals published during the National Revival Period were based in Romania. The first book printed in New Bulgarian, "Nedelnik" by Sophronius of Vratsa, was also printed in Romania, she said.

The Director of Romania's National Library, Elena Tirziman, said libraries have the important function to preserve and display national assets, which is also the mission of this exhibition. She expressed the hope that a whole series of such awareness initiatives and scientific events will be held.

The exhibition is the first occasion on which the National Library in Sofia has opened up its unique archive of National Revival publications. □

Four Bulgarian Films to Be Presented at Marche du Film in Cannes

Sofia - Four Bulgarian films will be presented at the Marche du Film during the 65th Cannes Film Festival, the National Film Centre said.

Bulgaria is participating for the third time in the South-Eastern Europe Pavilion with another seven Balkan countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro and Cyprus.

Six Bulgarian short films will be screened in the festival's Short Film Corner programme and Ilian Metev's documentary feature "Sofia's Last Ambulance" has made the selection of seven films in the 51st Critics' Week.

Born in 1981, Ilian Metev graduated from the National

Film and Television School in 2008 and has been working in London for design and advertising agencies. In 2009, Metev received the debut prize at the Golden Rhyton Festival for his 30-minute documentary which tells of a remote and dying town in the Bulgarian mountains.

Bulgaria's participation in Cannes this year is sponsored by the Domaine Boyar winery and the National Film Centre.

In 2011 Kamen Kalev's "The Island" was screened in The Directors' Fortnight and Konstantin Bozhanov's "Ave" was presented in the Critics' Week, the National Film Centre recalled. □

Check Disproves Allegations for Use of Substandard Steel in Heaters of Kozloduy N-plant Unit

Vratsa, Northern Bulgaria - An additional check has disproved allegations about low-grade steel used in the structure of the high-pressure heaters of Unit 5 of the Kozloduy N-plant, the N-plant said Thursday.

The check was done during an ongoing overhaul of this unit by Kozloduy experts in the presence of representatives of the equipment producer, the Podolsk Machine Building Plant, and designer ZIOMAR Engineering Company of Russia. It was prompted by Russian media reports earlier this year that the Podolsk Machine Building Plant had used substandard steel for some of its projects, including the Kozloduy N-plant.

"The results of the regular and additional tests and checks show that the metal used in the products for the Kozloduy N-plant order, comply with all quality requirements," the N-plant said in the statement.

The checks have found that the quality of steel and thickness of the steel components are of the standard set out in the design papers. The high-pressure heaters of the 1,000-MW Units 5 and 6 of Kozloduy were replaced in 2010 and 2011 during scheduled overhaul. □

End-of-April Fiscal Reserve Estimated at Lv 4,900 Mln

Sofia - Bulgaria's fiscal reserve amounted to an estimated 4,900 million leva at the end of April 2012, the Finance Ministry said in a press release on Thursday.

According to inconclusive figures, the budget position on the consolidated budget improved considerably in April 2012. Revenues for the month exceeded expenditures by 469 million leva, which was the largest excess for a calendar month since January 2009.

For January-April 2012, the budget deficit contracted to 217.2 million leva which, in nominal terms, translates into a 60 per cent reduction compared to the deficit reported for the same four-month period of 2011.

The improvement was entirely due to a better revenue collection and above all to an increase of tax revenue, the Finance Ministry reports.

During the period, VAT revenues rose by a nominal 22.1 per cent, year on year, and excise duty revenues increased by 6.9 per cent. Revenues from direct taxes and from property taxes under the municipal budgets also showed a certain growth from the comparable period a year ago.

Non-tax revenues and grants grew by 94.7 million leva as of April 2012. □

Bulgaria, Romania to Develop Joint Black Sea Coast Spatial Planning Scheme

Varna, on the Black Sea - Bulgaria and Romania will develop a joint spatial planning scheme of the Black Sea coast, Deputy Regional Development and Public Works Minister Nikolina Nikolova said Thursday in Varna. The project is worth 3.5 million euro and funding will be sought under the European regulation for technical assistance which is valid until 2013. Nikolova was taking part in an international conference on integrated management of coastal zones in the EU organized by the regional administration in Varna.

Concrete activities for protection

of the coast will be mapped out, Nikolova said, stating that landslides, for one, are one of the major problems for both countries. Measures for preserving biodiversity, coastal guarding and security, development of maritime business and infrastructure will also be earmarked.

Funding under a European regulation on maritime affairs, which will be valid for the 2014-2020 programme period, will be sought for the implementation of each of the projects. The budget of the regulation will exceed 5,500 million euro slightly, with 1,000 million euro set aside for integrated

maritime policy alone.

Deputy Environment and Water Minister Ivelina Vassileva, another lecturer at the forum, underscored that protecting the Black Sea from pollution is among the priorities of her ministry. In Varna region alone the ministry has coordinated projects for 106 million leva in the last three years, 90 million leva of which have already been paid. Five infrastructure projects with national funding for over 22 million leva are being implemented in the region and nearly a million leva have been provided for activities related to the protection of the environment. □

Ambassador Yuri Sterk Nominated as Head of EU Delegation in Tashkent

BTA correspondent Nikolay Jeliazkov

Brussels

Bulgarian Ambassador to Israel, Yuri Sterk is among the 15 newly nominated heads of EU Delegations, it emerged from an announcement made Wednesday by the office of EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton.

Sterk is to head the EU Delegation in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. "I have once again been impressed by the quality of the candidates for these important positions in the European External Action Service. The Service depends on the quality of its people, and the ability to attract the brightest and best diplomats is vital," Ashton said in her motives for the appointments, which take place in the context of the 2012 rotation of posts in the EU Delegations. □



Yuri Sterk

Photo - aliya.bg

Interior Minister: Disaster Prevention Requires Coordination among Public Institutions

Sofia - Opening a national emergency response conference on Thursday, Interior Minister Tsvetan Tsvetanov said coordination among public institutions is the most important thing in preventing natural disasters.

He said Bulgaria has proven itself as a disaster response partner in the world. Examples include the work of Bulgarian firefighters in putting out fires in Russia and Israel.

The presence of Prime Minister Boyko Borissov and members of his cabinet as well as EU Humanitarian Aid Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva in the flood-hit vil-



lage of Bisser has been very important for the local people, because it has shown that the government will do everything to help them, Tsvetanov said. Now that considerable amounts of rain are expected again, local authorities have been advised to take precautions about possible complications, he said.

Commissioner Georgieva told the conference that prevention and safety are the same thing when dealing with natural disasters and technological accidents. She believes that the flood response action taken in Bisser has put Bulgaria among the countries with the best practices in Europe. The residents of Bisser continue to receive aid, and institutional measures have been taken concerning the ownership of dams, Georgieva said.

According to her, 2011 was a record year for disasters worldwide, with damage amounting to 400 billion US dollars. Between 70 and 80 per cent of the damage was

recorded in developed countries, but 95 per cent of the victims fell in the developing part of the world, the Commissioner said. "The world is lagging behind - and we do not know what the risks will be. Japan believed it was best prepared, but it proved otherwise," she said.

Georgieva noted that a lev spent on disaster prevention saves seven to eight leva in damage. But insurance instruments in Bulgaria are still fledgling, she said. The EU is preparing to adopt new legislation by the year's end which will lay emphasis on risk assessment, according to her.

Addressing the conference, Defence Minister Anyu Angelov said Bulgaria needs better emergency management legislation, and noted that emergency management implies actions which are not necessarily about mitigating disaster effects. Disaster prevention requires monitoring, analysis, risk assessment, and forecasting, he added.

The Defence Minister believes that Bulgaria should have a permanent emergency response centre which analyzes and assesses the risks. Civilians should be taught how to act in such situations, he said. He recommended setting up a volunteer corps.

In 2011 and the first quarter of 2012, some 46 per cent of computer attacks were phishing schemes, said Transport, Information Technology and Communications Minister Ivaylo Moskovski. Another 17 per cent of these attacks involved malicious software, 3 per cent were aimed at blocking the operation of public institutions, and 7.7 per cent were mailserver hacking attacks.

Moskovski said that, regardless of whether cyber attacks are targeted at businesses or the government, the government's responsibility is very high, especially in respect of critical infrastructure (transport, information, and communication infrastructure). A government centre for cyber security incident response has been functioning in Bulgaria for a few years now, and an information security incident response centre was set up in early April 2012, the Minister said.

Discussing international partnerships for protecting critical infrastructure, Moskovski listed a memorandum of understanding between Bulgaria and NATO, and the country's involvement in the International Multilateral Partnership Against Cyber Threats. □

Austrian Companies Seek Share in Implementation of Major Infrastructure Projects in Varna

Varna, on the Black Sea - Austrian companies are showing serious interest in sharing in the implementation of major infrastructure projects in Varna, Austria's Ambassador to Bulgaria Gerhard Reiweger said here on Thursday after a session with city

Mayor Kiril Yordanov.

The diplomat specified that the companies in his country are interested in projects related to energy efficiency, water supply and wastewater management. In his words, Austrian business has ample experi-

ence and can also take effective part in building the tourist infrastructure.

Ambassador Reiweger added that the promotion of relations in the sphere of culture must continue. He noted that he is in Varna to attend the final concert of the Austrian Music Weeks in Bulgaria. □

NMSS Denies Accusations of Disuniting Centre-Right Political Spectrum

Sofia - The National Movement for Surge and Stability (NMSS) denied accusations of disuniting the centre-right political spectrum. "The NMSS works for unity of the centre-right spectrum and not for its break-up," the Liberal party leader Hristina Hristova told a news conference on Thursday. Hristova was reacting to accusations by the former leader of the right-wing Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), Martin Dimitrov, who said on Wednesday that he sees a plan for the destruction of the UDF which involves a coalition between NMSS and the Faith, Moral, Patriotism, Responsibility - National Ideal for (VMRO-NIE) Political Party.

Hristova said that for about a year now, NMSS has been holding talks on a pre-election centre-right alliance with the VMRO - NIE, the United Agrarians and the United People's Party. She also approached UDF leader Martin Dimitrov and other UDF figures. "We have not made any behind-the-scene deals with any political party. The UDF is familiar with our goal," Hristova said. No contact has been sought with Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (DSB).

The NMSS are also open to cooperation with Meglena Kuneva's Bulgaria for the Citizens. According to Hristova,

such centre-right consolidation could be an alternative to the incumbent government of GERB.

"Around 40 per cent of voters are inclined to support centrist formations, and apparently they are tired of the far right and left," Hristova noted.

At an extraordinary news conference at BTA on Thursday, VMRO-NIE Chairman Petko Atanassov denied any involvement in negotiations on a break-up of the Blue Coalition, describing this as "science fiction". Atanassov is perplexed why such statements come from Martin Dimitrov of all people. "It is precisely he who held talks with us, including before the [2011] presidential elections, and he in person assiduously solicited our support for their presidential candidate," Atanassov commented. He blames Dimitrov and DSB leader Ivan Kostov for the break-up of the Blue Coalition "because of their political myopia and outdated manner of talking with the rest of the centre-right political parties."

The VMRO-NIE will initiate meetings with all centre-right parties, including with the new UDF leadership, "on achieving a bon ton among the parties and on a serious political alternative to the GERB power holders". □

Alleged Money Launderer "Brendo" Arrested

Sofia - Evelin "Brendo" Banev has been arrested "on suspicion of having committed a crime", police sources told BTA.

Banev has been arrested in the Black Sea town of Sozopol and will be held for 24 hours, the police said. Later on, the prosecuting magistracy demanded his detention sine die as it has received materials from the Interior Ministry about his plans to leave the country and thus go into hiding and frustrate the normal progress of the criminal proceeding against him.

News of the arrest broke late on Wednesday evening. In a televised interview Thursday, Interior Minister Tsvetan Tsvetanov said that "the police begin a campaign to stamp out organized crime".

Banev had been on INTERPOL's Red Notice wanted list. He has been charged with laundering 2 million euro through a bank account belonging to Konstantin Dishliev's father. Dishliev, who was owner of Private Finance Union, was killed in May 2005. According to the prosecuting

authorities, Banev set up an organized crime group with his ex-wife Monika Dobrinova, her sister Dessislava, who is also Dishliev's widow, and Simo Karaichev.

The money laundering case against Banev had been widely expected to show the efficiency of the fight against organized crime, as he was alleged to be the man responsible for laundering the money of the notorious brothers Krassimir and Nikolai Marinov, aka "The Marguins".

Banev was arrested in April 2007. Five days later Yordanka Zapryanova, the main witness against him, was murdered at her home and the charges against Banev were subsequently dropped.

A year and a half later, Banev said in a Nova TV interview that former interior minister Roumen Petkov had tried to persuade him to testify against the Marguins. The brothers were acquitted in February 2012 of charges for plotting the murders of Lyuben Gotsev, Nikola Damyanov and crime boss Ivan "The

Doctor" Todorov.

Over the past few days the police have made several high-profile arrests of underworld figures, such as Anton "The Hamster" Petrov and Dimiter "The Eyes" Zhelyazkov. They were arrested on suspicion of plotting the killing of a top anti-mafia officer. However, the two were released after signing a warning. A Serbian national has also been detained for planning the murder of a young businessman with a criminal record.

Speaking to reporters after a conference on prevention, management and dealing with the aftermath of crisis, Tsvetanov said Banev has been charged in Switzerland with trafficking some 10 tonnes of cocaine to Europe from South America, money laundering and that his Swiss accounts holding millions of euro have been frozen. Swiss authorities have put him on Interpol's wanted list.

In Tsvetanov's words, Banev is "an extremely powerful organized crime figure". □

35% of Biodegradable Waste Should be Recovered by 2020 - Minister

Sofia - By 2020 Bulgaria should recover 35 per cent of biodegradable waste from the 1995 benchmark year, Environment and Waters Minister Nona Karadjova said here Thursday during a seminar which discussed the drafting of a national approach on the management of biodegradable waste.

Karadjova said that at the moment Bulgaria generates 1.6 million tonnes of biodegradable waste annually. The responsibility for the organization of the recovery of biodegradable waste lies with municipalities, who will be assisted with money from the budget and EU funds, Karadjova said. Incentives, such as exemption from environmental fees when waste recovery targets are achieved, will be provided for the introduction of separate collection of biodegradable waste.

Karadjova said that a facility for recovery of biodegradable waste in Sofia, whose construction is financed with EU funds, should be commissioned in the middle of 2014. She said that the Sofia City Hall has already started work on a system for separate collection of this waste. The Sofia City Hall may require from restaurants, other entertainment establishments, municipal kindergartens and schools to ensure separate collection of their biodegradable waste, Karadjova said. □



Mothers of disabled children protested in front of the building of the Health Ministry against the negligence on the part of the state of children with rare diseases
BTA Photo

Over 41% of Bulgarian Producers Cut Prices of Goods in Supermarket Chains, 54% Increased Output Due to Work with Chains - Study

Sofia - Over 41 per cent of Bulgarian producers have brought down the prices of goods they sell through the supermarket chains, according to a nationally representative study. Done between March 19 and 22 this year among 100 Bulgarian companies, the study looked at the attitude of food suppliers to the European supermarket chains operating in Bulgaria and the results were made public at a news conference in Sofia Thursday.

About 54 per cent of the respondents in the poll reported increasing their output after starting to work with the large chains and only 15 per cent have decreased it. In another trend, 45 per cent of suppliers have improved the quality of their goods.

Suppliers see as an asset in their work with the chains the opportunity they get to reach new markets in Bulgaria and Europe. New jobs and a larger variety of goods are also among the advantages.

What suppliers expect is better terms in their business with the chains, better taxes and more subsidies. □

Bulgarian Foods, Beverages Attract Romanian Business People at Trade Fair in Bucharest

Bucharest - Bulgarian foods, beverages and other products attract the interest of Romanian business people at a trade fair held in the Bulgarian restaurant "Balchik" here. The exhibition is organized by the Bulgarian Embassy in Bucharest and was opened by Sofia Mayor Yordanka Fandakova and Bulgarian commercial attache in Bucharest Bronislav Denev.

Opening the event, Fandakova quoted exhibitors' opinions about the success of its previous edition.

Denev recalled that commercial exchange between Bulgaria and Romania stood at 3,500 million euros last year. Nearly 1,500 Bulgarian companies export their produce to Romania, he said.

Twenty-six companies from different parts of Bulgaria participate in this year's edition of the exhibition, among them makers of wines, cheese, and deli foods. □



A Bulgarian-Serbian organisation for cooperation in the social sphere was established in BTA's Press Club in Vidin (on the Danube) under a project of the Free Youth Centre NGO. The new organisation bears the name of a project implemented by the centre - Regional Integration with Social Effect (RISE). The project is financed by the European Union through the Bulgaria-Serbia Cross-border Cooperation Programme. The Open Club Association for the Development of Children and Youth, Nis, Republic of Serbia is partner under the project.
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project implemented by the centre - Regional Integration with Social Effect (RISE). The project is financed by the European Union through the Bulgaria-Serbia Cross-border Cooperation Programme. The Open Club Association for the Development of Children and Youth, Nis, Republic of Serbia is partner under the project.

Move over Scotland: Bulgarian Bagpipers Set Record

Sofia - With the support of Indian spiritual leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Bulgarian musicians put their Scottish counterparts in the shade with a world record for the largest bagpipe ensemble, Reuters wrote Thursday.

The 333 Bulgarian folk musicians gathered in central Sofia late on Wednesday, blowing their kaba-gaidas - bagpipes from the Rhodope mountains in the south of the Balkan country - to set the first such Guinness world record.

Dressed in traditional colorful Rhodope costumes, bagpipers started with a famous folk song - Delyu Haidutin - which was included in a Voyager golden record with the songs and sounds of our planet and sent as a message to space by NASA in 1977.

The event also aimed to bring a

spot of joy to a nation which a survey showed was among the most unhappy on the planet. Having joined the European Union in 2007, it is still the bloc's poorest member and recovering from a deep recession.

"You have big roots. Do not lose them, but increase old tradition and culture," Shankar told an audience of over 4,000 people who gathered to hear his advice on how to be happy and listen to the bagpipers.

According to the Earth Institute's World Happiness Report released in April, Bulgaria was in the top 10 of more than 150 countries which were least satisfied with life and was the most unhappy in Europe.

To help came Indian guru Ravi Shankar - one of the world's most popular spiritual leaders who travels around the world to spread his vision



BTA Photo

of a stress-free, violence-free society.

His The Art of Living foundation is the world's biggest non-governmental organization, and 30 million people in 155 countries have attended Shankar's courses. □

National Volleyball Team Coach Returns, Demands Resignation of Federation President



BTA Photo

Sofia - Radostin Stoichev remains coach of the Bulgarian national volleyball team until the end of the June Olympic qualifiers in Sofia, the last chance of the team to secure a berth for the London Games. Stoichev has only one condition for his future after that - the resignation of Bulgarian Volleyball Federation President Dancho

Lazarov.

Stoichev's decision to return resulted from his Wednesday talk with Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, as well as the support he received from the national volleyball team and the fans, he himself told a news conference at the Arena Armeec sports hall Thursday.

Stoichev was fired three days ago for failing to lead Bulgaria to a victory in a semi-final against Germany in a 2012 Olympic Games European qualification tournament in Sofia. The vacancy was first offered to Italian coaching star Silvano Prandi, but he declined the offer, saying he did not see the conditions were right for him to do the job well. □

One of World's Best Tango Couples to Perform in Sofia

Sofia - One of the best tango couples - Rodrigo Rofino and Gisela Passi is to come for the concert of Bulgarian violinist Svetlin Roussev and the Tanguisimo ensemble within the European Music Festival. Rodrigo and Gisela will share the stage with one of Bulgaria's most famous tango couples - Dani Ivancheva and Chavdar Krumov at Sofia's Bulgaria Hall on May 18 at 19:30h, the organizers said.

The notable performers of Argentine tango arrive from Paris - the

tango mecca of Europe. Rodrigo and Gisela are young, talented Argentine dancers from Buenos Aires.

In the last few years Rodrigo and Gisela perform at some the most prestigious halls in the world, along with the French Tanguisimo ensemble, the Uruguayan singer Jose Luis Barreto and Bulgarian violinist Svetlin Roussev. "It is not a coincidence that we chose to work with Rodrigo and Gisela, because they are a couple with a unique, noble style. Their dance expresses the

whole magic of tango, by contributing to the perfect balance and rich sound of music. I believe that our concert will leave the Bulgarian audience with the feeling of the Argentine tango's unique passion throughout the whole summer," Roussev said.

The European Music Festival is organized by Cantus Firmus, Classic FM Radio with cooperation from Sofia Town Hall and the Ministry of Culture. The Festival is held under the auspices of Sofia Mayor Yordanka Fandakova. □

Access to Information Programme: Tacit Denials of Information Remain Too Many, More State Institutions Update Regularly Own Websites

Sofia - Tacit denials of information sought by the Access to Information Act remained high in 2011, according to a report by the Access to Information Programme. The report looks at the access to information last year and was presented to the press here Thursday.

In another trend, fewer state institutions fail to regularly update their websites. Among them are the Regional Directorate of the Interior Ministry in Haskovo and the regional health inspectorates in Blagoevgrad, Sliven, Shoumen and Pleven.

People most frequently cited the Access to Information Act to obtain information from the executive and the local authorities. Those seeking

information included members of the public, journalists and NGOs.

The report speaks of a growing number of people seeking legal assistance in the area of access to information. An increasing number of people are claiming their access to information rights: 257 in 2011 against 151 in 2008.

Even though the leaders of administrative units in the executive are required by law to provide up-to-date online information about their activity, no serious progress is reported in the observable period. Websites of government departments and agencies frequently lack a clear description of their responsibilities and competence. □

Bulgaria Alerts Greece, Turkey about Possible Tidal Wave in Rivers Marista, Toundja

Sofia - A flooding alert has been issued by the early warning system in the water catchment area of the rivers Marista and Toundja, Southern Bulgaria, the Environment and Water Ministry said in a press release Thursday. A red alert has been issued about the Marista River at Harmanli and an orange alert at Purvomai, Plovdiv, and Svilengrad. A yellow alert has been issued about the rivers Sazliika at Gulubovo and

Toundja at Yambol.

The competent authorities in Greece and Turkey have been alerted about a possible tidal wave in the lower stretch of the Maritsa River.

The National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology with the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences issued a yellow alert about heavy rain in three northern regions, Lovech, Veliko Turnovo, and Gabrovo, and in six southern regions, Haskovo, Stara

Zagora, Kurdjali, Plovdiv, Smolyan and Pazardjik.

The Environment and Water Ministry urged for special attention regarding the Yantra River and its tributaries, Rossitsa and Djoulyunitsa, in Northern Bulgaria, and the Marista River, and its tributaries Chepinska, Vucha, Chepelarska, Mechka, Haskovska, Harmnaliiska and Stryama, and the River Toundja, in Southern Bulgaria. □



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Exchange Rates

Sofia - The Bulgarian National Bank sets the rates of foreign currencies against the Bulgarian lev applicable from 5 p.m. on May 17 to 5 p.m. on May 18, 2012. The central rates are used for the purposes of accounting, statistics, customs valuation and remittances. The commercial banks set the exchange rates at which foreign exchange is bought and sold.

May 17 - May 18 , 2012			
CURRENCY	ISO CODE	FOR	LEVA
AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR	AUD	1	1.52859
BRAZILIAN REAL	BRL	10	7.68801
CANADIAN DOLLAR	CAD	1	1.5211
SWISS FRANC	CHF	1	1.62837
CHINESE YUAN RENMINBI	CNY	10	2.4382
CZECH KORUNA	CZK	100	7.66541
DANISH KRONE	DKK	10	2.63135
BRITISH POUND	GBP	1	2.44235
HONG KONG DOLLAR	HKD	10	1.98519
CROATIAN KUNA	HRK	10	2.59016
HUNGARIAN FORINT	HUF	1,000	6.56649
INDONESIAN RUPIAH	IDR	10,000	1.66837
IZRAELI SHEKEL	ILS	10	4.02932
INDIAN RUPIAH	INR	100	2.83052
ICELANDIC KRONA *	ISK		
JAPANESE YEN	JPY	100	1.92181
SOUTH KOREAN WON	KRW	1,000	1.32337
LITHUANIAN LITAS	LTL	10	5.66448
LATVIAN LAT	LVL	1	2.80366
MEXICAN PESO	MXN	10	1.1156
MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	MYR	1	4.95335
NORWEGIAN KRONE	NOK	10	2.58018
NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	NZD	1	1.17644
PHILIPPINE PESO	PHP	100	3.58539
POLISH ZLOTY	PLN	10	4.49782
NEW ROMANIAN LEU	RON	10	4.40036
RUSSIAN ROUBLE	RUB	100	4.94208
SWEDISH KRONA	SEK	10	2.14089
SINGAPOREAN DOLLAR	SGD	10	1.21616
THAI BAHT	THB	100	4.90995
NEW TURKISH LIRA	TRY	10	8.43067
US DOLLAR	USD	1	1.54221
SOUTH AFRICAN RAND	ZAR	10	1.84321
GOLD	XAU	1 troy ounce	2,381.1

*From 01.09.2010 the BNB discontinued the publication of the ISK/BGN exchange rate in relation to the discontinued quotation by the European Central Bank (ECB) of the ISK/EUR reference exchange rate. When the quotation of the ISK/EUR exchange rate by the ECB is resumed, the BNB will resume the publication of the ISK/BGN exchange rate.

**Today's Observances:
May 18**

The world:

International Museum Day
World AIDS Vaccine Day

On this day in Bulgarian history:

1903 - The Port of Bourgas goes into operation. It was built between 1895 and 1903 by a Belgian company on a French design.
1906 - The new Port of Varna opens.

1909 - King Ferdinand establishes the Order of St. Cyril and St. Methodius as the highest Bulgarian honour. The act is dedicated to the country's independence.

1982 - The fourth unit of the Kozloduy nuclear power plant goes into operation. □

**DAILY NEWS
DAILY NEWS**

The only English-language daily newsletter in Bulgaria

It offers you the latest in Bulgarian politics, business, culture, public life and sports. The events are covered with extensive background information and detailed profiles of all players. There are also interviews, regular updates on legislative changes and a Weekly Round-up of Political Events at the end of the week. Enclosed with the Daily News is a same-day Press Review. □

Weather Forecast

Sofia - Cloudy, with rain showers in many places, mostly in the Central and Southeastern parts. Highs: 14 to 19C, in Sofia around 14C.

THE MOUNTAINS: Cloudy, with fog on mountain ridges. Rain in many places with snow above 2,000

metres. Highs: around 8C at 1,200 metres and around 3C at 2,000 metres above sea level.

THE COAST: Significant cloud with showers. Highs: 18-20C. Sea water temperature around 18-19C. □

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