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Romania, Bulgaria Fully Meet Schengen's Technical Criteria but Some Countries Have Reservations about Their Accession

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Brussels

Romania and Bulgaria fully meet the technical criteria for Schengen membership, but some countries have expressed reservations about their accession to the area because of the lack of confidence, European Home Affairs Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom said on Wednesday. According to her, Sofia and Bucharest stand to gain from an improvement of the functioning of the Schengen area.

The European Commission is considering to provide for the possibility for temporary freezing of a country's Schengen membership according to clear criteria and in the event of emergency, Malmstrom said.

Schengen is a fantastic achieve-

ment that should be safeguarded and that can be improved, and the European Commission is considering ways to do that, she said. As any other EU policy, the Schengen policy may have weaknesses, so the Commission is proposing better administration of the area, she said. The Commissioner noted that many countries are opposed to the planned changes, and expressed hope that current events will accelerate the making of relevant decisions.

Malmstrom went on to say that later in the day the European Commission would also publish specific proposals to harmonize the EU asylum policy. These are matters that have been discussed for a long time, and it is just a mere coincidence that they are being addressed at a time of an increasing migrant flow from North Africa to Europe, according to



her. Historically, Europe has witnessed bigger migration waves but the current problem is that many people are coming to the continent

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Possible Nomination of PM Borissov in Presidential Race Sparks Comments

Sofia - A televised interview of Interior Minister Tsvetan Tsvetanov in which he said that his GERB party has three potential candidates to choose from for the autumn presidential elections and one of them is Prime Minister and GERB leader Boyko Borissov, triggered



immediate comments in Parliament Wednesday.

Tsvetanov heads GERB's campaign headquarters for this autumn's presidential and local elections.

He said during the interview that it is natural for

a political party which wants to be a factor in political life to consider the nomination of its leader for the presidential race.

In the corridors of Parliament, GERB Floor Leader Krassimir Velchev explained that the top party leadership - the Executive Committee - has not yet discussed potential nominees and that Borissov could have been nominated by local structures. He added that the nomi-

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within a short period of time, she said.

Malmstrom reported that 25,000 Africans have arrived in the EU since the onset of the crisis in North Africa. A small part of them have sought asylum. The crisis has raised the question about solidarity and confidence among the EU member states, she said.

Bulgaria will support the European Commission's proposal to provide for a possibility for temporary freezing of a country's Schengen membership according to clear criteria and in the event of emergency, Interior Minister Tsvetan Tsvetanov told journalists after meeting with EU ambassadors.



BTA Photo

PM Tells Parliament that Bulgaria's European Development Depends on Support for Euro Plus Pact

Sofia - "Bulgaria's European development depends on its support for the Euro Plus Pact," said Prime Minister Boyko Borissov on Wednesday. He familiarized MPs with the cabinet's position on the issue.

Borissov said that the decision to join the Pact was made after careful consideration and that although ini-



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tially the ministers held conflicting views, a consensus was reached that Bulgaria should support the new EU facility.

The pact involves measures which Bulgaria will have to implement at any rate in order to gain in competitiveness and innovation, improve public finances and sustain financial stability, said the Prime Minister.

In his words, the possibility that Bulgaria, the EU poorest member country, should bail out Eurozone countries exists on paper only. Borissov once again reiterated that Bulgaria's contribution of 300 million euro will be paid only after Bulgaria joins the Euro zone and becomes part of the permanent EU financial stability mechanism. A freeze on the adjustment of wages has been scrapped. A

new provision allows for the increase of wages on the condition that social dialogue is respected.

There is no requirement that wages should grow more slowly than labour productivity, said Borissov. He added that because of the low pay in Bulgaria, wages will continue to increase at a higher rate than labour productivity. The key is to contain growth in order to avoid the Greek scenario, said the Prime Minister.

The Pact puts in place a mechanism monitoring single unit labour costs over a period of time between the different countries. Borissov quoted Eurostat data that over the past three years Bulgaria's current deficit has dropped sharply, from 20.6 per cent of GDP in 2008, to 3.3 per cent in 2010 and a projected 2.3 per cent in 2012. The trade balance deficit has also edged down, reaching 6.8 per cent in 2010. In the next two years it is projected to decrease to 6.5 per cent.

Borissov said that no requirement has been set to increase retirement age, but that the government will be forced to do it if it is unable to pay pensions.

Direct taxation will remain within the powers of the government. For two years despite the crisis Bulgaria has sustained the lowest taxes EU-wide, recalled Borissov, underscoring that no pressure has been put on Bulgaria to increase the 10 per cent flat tax.

The main political goals of the cabinet coincide with the Pact's requirements: improving competitiveness, restricting monopoly, better education, pension reforms, transparent governance in the financial sector, and labour market reforms, said Borissov. According to him, this means a serious commitment to implementing reforms.

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PM Tells Parliament that Bulgaria's European Development Depends on Support for Euro Plus Pact

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The means to achieving these goals are envisaged in the Financial Stability Pact, proposed by the Finance Ministry. These include limiting the role of the state in funds redistribution through the budget, a more complex mechanism for boosting direct taxes and a widely balanced budget. "The trust of our European partners is won through real political actions and not through statements, said

Borissov. The Prime Minister added that he is convinced that Bulgaria has done the right thing supporting the Pact.

"In order to become a member of the Eurozone, Bulgaria had to join the Euro Plus Pact. Otherwise, we will not be able to defend our positions," said the Prime Minister, taking questions by MPs.

When supporting the Euro Plus, the government has not raised the issue for Bulgaria's entry into ERM-2, said Finance Minister Simeon Djankov, taking a question in Parliament. □

Possible Nomination of PM Borissov in Presidential Race Sparks Comments

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needs will be considered later and that the Executive Committee is also competent to make personnel decisions when a potential election candidate has to leave the job he or she currently takes.

Socialist party leader Sergei Stanishev commented that in Borissov's case running for President would add up to the burden of the prime minister's office. The right thing for Borissov to do would be to deliver on the commitments he made when he became Prime Minister, serve out his term and then run for any office he wants.

The Socialist leader believes one reason for GERB's possible decision to nominate Borissov for President is that they lack enough "strong figures who enjoy popular support".

By way of a comment, Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) leader Martin Dimitrov said the only reasonable move for GERB is to support the presidential candidate of the Blue Coalition (UDF and Democrats for Strong Bulgaria). "GERB is in a deadlock and the only sensible way out is to miss these elections which they can do elegantly by supporting our presidential candidate," he said.

The Blue Coalition candidate will be chosen at party preliminaries where party members and supporters will have to choose between the candidate of UDF, Roumen Hristov, and of DSB, Svetoslav Malinov.

"This is the most elegant move and the only way to keep the present government: back another Right-wing organization and thus shed the responsibility," Dimitrov added. He also said that there can be no GERB government without Boyko Borissov: "he brought them together and got them into Parliament, and if he runs for President and wins, we will have early elections and everything will start from scratch". He was adamant that the majority of Bulgarians would see this as fleeing responsibility. □

Parliamentary Monitor: Wednesday

Sofia - Hristo Bisserov MP of the centrist opposition Movement for Rights and Freedoms is taking over the rotating chairmanship of the Legal Affairs Committee's subcommittee overseeing the use of special surveillance means, Parliament Chair Tsetska Tsacheva said on Wednesday.

Parliament passed amendments to the Technical Requirements for Products Act on , transposing EU directives and regulations into national legislation.

When a product is found to pose a serious hazard, the market supervision authorities will warn consumers against using the product and will require the producer, importer or distributor to withdraw it from the market. If the hazard cannot be removed by technical means, the authorities will order its destruction.

The amendments are also aimed to bring national legislation in line with the EU Framework Directive on Eco-Design of Energy-Using Products. □

UN Secretary-General to Participate in Sofia-Hosted International Conference

Sofia - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is coming to Bulgaria Thursday to participate in a two-day international conference titled "Sofia Platform: Central and Eastern Europe's Transition and the Change in the Middle East".

Ban Ki-moon is scheduled to meet with President Georgi Parvanov on May 6 and before that - with National Assembly Chair Tsetska Tsacheva.



More than 150 participants from Europe, North Africa and the Middle East will take part in the conference on May 5 and 6, the Foreign Ministry said Wednesday.

Political leaders, activists, journalists, representatives of NGOs will discuss the recent changes in the Arab world against the background of the transition experience of Central and Eastern Europe.

Speaking on the eve of the conference, Bulgarian Foreign Minister Nickolay Mladenov said, as quoted by the press release: "I believe that

the international community, including the European Union, must do its best to assist the Arab countries on their road to democratic, prosperous and stable societies.

"By organizing this conference, Bulgaria would like to reaffirm its solidarity with the commendable efforts of the nascent Arab civil societies, aimed at building democracy, and achieving dignity and justice."

Starting in 1989, Central and Eastern Europe went through a difficult but ultimately successful transformation. Two decades down the road, democratic institutions have been entrenched, citizens' rights and freedoms are better safeguarded, while market economy has improved the lives of a growing majority within each of the countries.

The Arab world is now at a critical junction as momentum builds towards the development of democracy. Driven by people power the Middle East has embarked on its own transition. The energy, a desire for freedom and the drive for reforms are there, but much like in the early days of 1989, it is not clear where the transition will lead.

While the historic, cultural and political contexts in the Middle East and North Africa are markedly different, the experience of Central and Eastern Europe, including mistakes, wrong choices and steps not taken, could be a very helpful starting point for a mutually enriching exchange of views and perspectives.

"Perhaps the biggest lesson learned from our own transition is that you can't impose change from the outside. However, having something to learn from and avoid repeating at least some of the mistakes that others have made, would be useful," Mladenov noted.

In six topical panels, Sofia Platform will provide an inventory of ideas, know-how and relevant experience for the countries in the Middle East to draw upon in the areas of political reforms, transparency and anti-corruption, civil society and free media. The speakers at the conference, in addition to Ban Ki-moon, include Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, Hungarian Foreign Minister Janos Martonyi (on behalf of the EU Presidency), Foreign Ministers Luis Amado (Portugal), Carl Bildt (Sweden), Dimitris Droutsas (Greece) and Sven Alkalaj (Bosnia and Herzegovina), the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe Torbjorn Jagland; former Bulgarian President Zhelyu Zhelev and former Prime Minister Philip Dimitrov.

In turn, the Atlantic Club in Bulgaria announced that, together with the United Nations Association in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute and Sofia University, they will host a public lecture of the UN Secretary-General. This event will be held from 5:15 pm local time on May 5, Thursday, at the Ceremonial Hall of Sofia University. □

Advisory to Daily News subscribers

Dear Daily News Subscribers,

During the coming long weekend: St George Day (May 6) and Saturday and Sunday, "Daily News" will put out one issue covering the three days, which will be available in the early hours of May 9. The Press Review (on days when newspapers are due during this period) will also be available on May 9. □

New National Assembly Plenary Session Launched with Parliamentary Group Declarations

Sofia - The new plenary session of the National Assembly began on Wednesday with declarations in the name of the parliamentary groups presenting their priorities. The statements were broadcast live by the Bulgarian National Television and the Bulgarian National Radio.

GERB

"With the laws passed so far GERB has proved that it fulfils its promises consistently. During the new plenary session, too, we will continue in these steps so that the public will regain its faith in statehood and the institutions," GERB parliamentary group Chairman Krassimir Velchev said in his party's declaration.

Velchev noted that GERB and the government have pooled the maximum efforts so that all technical criteria for Bulgaria's accession to the Schengen area may be fulfilled.

The parliamentary group promised that guaranteeing the fundamental rights of citizens will be among the leading objectives at drafting revisions to the Special Surveillance Means Act.

The parliamentary group of the incumbents promised that a Temporary Work Agency will be established. Another promise was that the time-limit for access to medicines paid by the state will be reduced from 135 to 60 days by merging the Price Commission and the Positive List Commission with the Ministry of Health into a single Reimbursement Commission.

Ataka

"I am amazed by the lack of ideals and the ideological crisis that have emerged in politics in Bulgaria," Ataka leader Volen Siderov declared. He noted, though, that the crisis of ideas exists not only in Bulgaria, but all over the world.

"In Bulgaria, twenty years after the onset of democracy there is no political ideology: the left does not have ideas, it does not have what to offer even its own audience, while the ideology of the remnants of the right, which was a very promising political force in the beginning of the transition, boil down to 'No to Belene N-plant!'," Siderov said.

According to him, the left and the right have changed and have been obliterated on a global scale. Western leaders have long stopped to abide by the interests of their peoples and one can already notice the trend of growing support for political forces analogous to Ataka all over Europe, Siderov said, quoting France and Jean-Marie Le Pen.

The Blue Coalition

The National Assembly ought to set a clear priority from now on on proactive people, keeping their jobs, promoting their businesses and their survival, Blue Coalition co-chairman Martin Dimitrov said. The Blue Coalition promised partnership to the power holders in the fight against monopolies and in the effort to achieve financial stability. The right-wing party is firmly opposed to the majority's focus on the construction of the Belene nuclear power plant, Dimitrov said.

He criticized Parliament and the government for

lacking a clear-cut economic plan for pulling the country out of the crisis, at a time when unemployment is growing and prices are rising while the purchasing power of ordinary Bulgarians is falling and the middle class is saying that it is struggling to survive. He blamed the cabinet for failing to help small and medium-sized businesses and for imposing new taxes on them, as well as for helping the monopolies to hatchet up prices. He called for urgent anti-trust policies.

Coalition for Bulgaria

If GERB cannot deliver its promises, it had better go, Coalition for Bulgaria floor leader Sergei Stanishev said. GERB's priorities seem too divorced from the Bulgarian reality, and there seem to be two realities in Bulgaria, according to Stanishev. One is the virtual reality of the government and the ruling party, which claim that Bulgarians lead a good life, and the other is the real world in which many Bulgarians struggle to survive.

Stanishev accused the power holders of failing to deliver their election promise to turn Bulgaria into an average EU country.

Under GERB, Bulgarians saw their incomes fall about 10 per cent, and the first pay rise has been planned for July 2013. In the first quarter of 2011 alone the budget gap was about 740 million leva, foreign direct investments shrank threefold, and the government is steadily losing credibility, both in Bulgaria and in the EU, Stanishev added.

Saying he was glad that Bulgaria was prepared in technical terms to join the Schengen area, Stanishev noted that the government ought to ensure political support as well. The Group of the Party of European Socialists does support Bulgaria's Schengen entry, he said, reacting to GERB's criticisms.

Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF)

It is time to stop making piecemeal policies and "putting out fires", and to start making decisions which are part of a comprehensive national vision for development, MRF deputy leader Lyutvi Mestan said in a declaration.

MRF expects the majority to change the rules of using special surveillance means as promised in the wake of the scandals a few months ago. There is a need of real evidence that the power holders will refrain from using the law enforcement authorities for narrow partisan interests, so the international monitors whom MRF hopes that GERB will invite will not register serious violations, Mestan said. At least the Special Surveillance Means Act should be amended to guarantee fair presidential and local elections, he said.

While the strategic target is to allocate 3 per cent of GDP for science and innovations, GERB's target is a mere 1.5 per cent, with the state subsidy at 0.6 per cent. These are the levels the previous government reported for 2008, so MRF expects these levels to be raised. Mestan urged GERB to come up with a Scientific Research Strategy and a new Higher Education Act as promised. □

Sofia's NDK Convention Centre To Be Restructured, to Have New Management

Sofia - The National Palace of Culture (NDK), Bulgaria's biggest congress and exhibition centre and a popular landmark in Sofia, will be transformed into a state-owned single-shareholder joint-stock company and will have a new management, said Minister of Finance Simeon Djankov. This is expected to end an era of lacking transparency and accountability in the operation of NDK.

NDK opened in 1981 and is currently the largest congress, conference, convention and exhibition centre in Southeastern Europe with its total area of 123,000 square meters, thirteen concert and convention halls, restaurants and offices rented by companies. NDK has never paid taxes and its revenues remain unclear thanks to its unique status as "an artistic commercial association".

"Artistic commercial association"

does not exist under any effective Bulgarian law, Finance Minister Djankov pointed out Wednesday.

The financial authorities are starting an audit which will cover NDK's finances in the last ten years.

Initially, NDK will be headed by the Ministry of Finance, while a series of audits are done, then transferred to the Ministry of Culture.

NDK's purpose and activities will remain the same. Culture Minister Vezhdi Rashidov said it will remain a culture hub despite the changes.

The new management structure will include a five-member board of directors.

The Varna Festival and Congress Centre, an establishment of the same purpose but smaller size, also suffers from a lack of financial transparency and accountability. Finance Minister Djankov said the plan is to merge it



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with NDK into a single legal entity the way it was upon their establishment. A final decision is yet to be made. □

Moody's Issues Annual Sovereign Report on Bulgaria, Likely to Upgrade Government Ratings

New York - Bulgaria's Baa3 government ratings reflect the country's healthy government finances and its moderate economic strength, and are currently on review for possible upgrade in recognition of the rapid fiscal consolidation achieved since 2009 and the strengthening of public institutions, Moody's Investors Service says in a new report quoted in a press release by this rating agency.

Moody's expects Bulgaria's fiscal deficits to fall below the EU's Maastricht criteria of 3 per cent of GDP this year and shrink towards zero in the years ahead, thanks to prudent fiscal management and an increasingly robust economic recovery.

Bulgaria has the second-lowest debt in the EU after Estonia.

Moodies' expect the macroeconomic policy framework to remain predictable thanks to decisions to enshrine fiscal prudence within the constitution. An agreement among government, business, and unions on measures to assure the sustainability of the public pension system while fostering growth in the private pension system is also contributing to predictability, the statement says.

This country's institutional capacity was strengthened in the process of EU accession, and Moody's assesses Bulgaria's institutional strength as moderate. "This reflects a mix of factors, with Bulgaria's government effectiveness and particularly the rule of law (admittedly

backward-looking) scoring rather low on international surveys conducted by the World Bank and others. This is due to the still far from complete effort to eradicate corruption," says the statement.

Moody's go on to say that sizeable contraction in macroeconomic imbalances, including the reduction in the current account deficit from 23 per cent in 2008 to just 1 per cent last year, is not likely to be meaningfully reversed.

Competitive wages and low tax rates should help maintain private sector investment, while public investment will also be supported by EU structural funds, says Moody's. The government's National Reform Programme sets an ambitious but not altogether unrealistic goal of raising Bulgaria's incomes to 60 per cent of the Eurozone average by 2020, up from the current 40 per cent.

Susceptibility to event risk, which is a critical element in the Moody's sovereign bond rating methodology - is moderate for Bulgaria, mainly reflecting the economy's extensive euroization, high external debt and weak external liquidity. The currency board arrangement is well-established and highly unlikely to be changed, having survived a very tough test during the global crisis. Still, Moody's will probably not lower its assessment of event risk at least until Bulgaria has been cleared to join the European Exchange Rate Mechanism II, bringing euro membership closer, the statement goes. □

Sharp Increase in Number of Bulgarian Prostitutes in Norway

Sofia - 2010 saw a serious increase in the number of Bulgarian women prostituting in Norway, it emerged at a conclusive presentation of a Bulgarian-Norwegian project aimed at combatting trafficking in hu-



Interior Minister Chief Secretary Kalin Georgiev (left), Interior Minister Tsvetan Tsvetanov (right) and Norway's Ambassador here Tove Skarstein
BTA Photo

mans. The 350,000-euro project was implemented by the Bulgarian Organized Crime Control Directorate General and the Norwegian police.

A Norwegian expert commented that the growing number of Bulgarian prostitutes has started to turn into a serious problem. In 2009 when Norway banned prostitution with a law, the Bulgarian women who went there to prostitute stated as a purpose of their visit that they would pick wild fruits in the mountain.

Head of the Organized Crime Control Directorate General, Stanimir Florov, said that there are about 100 Bulgarian prostitutes in Norway.

Nearly 230 officers of the Bulgarian Interior Ministry and the prosecution authority were trained under the project. A manual was also published which helps identify potential victims of human trafficking.

Norwegian Ambassador in Bulgaria Tove Skarstein said that her country is one of the main destinations of the victims of trafficking in humans, so that the goal is to catch the perpetrators. □

Secret Service Records Bill Fails

Sofia - Parliament on Wednesday dismissed a proposal by the right-wing Blue Coalition to amend the law on public disclosure of secret service records. The Coalition's Ivan Kostov and Yordan Bakalov had proposed scrapping a provision whereby a person's former affiliation with the communist-era secret services may not be publicly disclosed if that person has headed a department or a unit at the Military Information Service under the Minister of Defence (the military intelligence) or at the National Intelligence Service since July 16, 1991.

The proposal was only backed by 16 MPs. Another 20 voted against it, and 68 abstained from voting.

Kostov said the motion was aimed at shedding light on a possible link between organized crime and the State Security Committee (the communist-era secret political police). In effect, however, the proposal referred exclu-

sively to the intelligence services, and not the former repressive apparatus of the government.

The Socialist-dominated Coalition for Bulgaria (CfB) argued that the bill would harm the national interests, particularly in the current international situation. Angel Naidenov added that the issue about the State Security Committee is being used as "a means for resuscitating a political image and as political Viagra against a falling public approval rating." CfB Floor Leader Sergei Stanishev described the motion as "an attempt to politicize Bulgarian intelligence" and a move which is "a far cry from the contemporary notion of national security."

Hristo Bisserov of the centrist Movement for Rights and Freedoms said the bill failed to address the issue of whether the secret services of the post-communist transition period have controlled the political class. □

President Decrees Appointments, Promotions in the Military

Sofia - President Georgi Purvanov, who is also Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Bulgarian Armed Forces, on Wednesday decreed that Major General Georgi Georgiev be replaced as Chief of the Georgi Rakovski Defence and Staff College by Captain Dimiter Angelov, who is promoted to Commodore. Georgiev is also discharged from the Armed Forces.

Major General Boiko Rabadjiiski is dismissed as Chief of Staff for Procurement and Support Services and discharged from the Armed Forces.

The President further decreed the promotion of Colonel Zlatko Zlatev to Brigadier General. □

Following Reforms, Losses in BDZ Holding Decrease to 47 Million Leva in 2010

Sofia - Privatization of the cargo services of the Bulgarian State Railways (BDZ), improvement of the BDZ infrastructure, and staff cuts are in the pipeline for the BDZ Holding, Chairman of the Board of Directors, Vladimir Vladimirov, said Wednesday. Vladimirov attended a roundtable which discussed the plan for restructuring and financial stabilization of the company. He said that in the first three months of 2011 losses of the company were by seven million leva less than the like period in 2010. For the entire 2010 BDZ's losses decreased to 47 million leva. The losses in 2009 were 69 million leva.

Ninety measures have been drawn up to be implemented in 2011. The aim is for the companies in the BDZ Holding to break even by 2014, Vladimirov said.

He recalled that a loan will be taken from the World Bank which will be used to settle the debts of the company, thus avoiding its being declared insolvent.

Vladimirov said that the restructuring plan envisages streamlining the activities in all companies in the holding, cost cutting and increasing of revenue. A benchmark survey is being prepared into demand for passenger services with different levels of quality, which will be used to determine the investment policy there.

Senior Economist with the Open Society Institute Georgi Angelov said that if the trade unions once again stop the reforms in the BDZ Holding, the company will not survive. According to Angelov, the plan for restructuring and financial stabilization of the BDZ "is the best thing that happened to the company in the past 20 years".

The economist suggested that some railway services be transferred to municipalities. "If the municipality decides it needs the respective railway service, then it should be in charge of it," he said.

Angelov also recommended that the BDZ "is relieved" in whole or in part of the cargo services after the economy starts to recover. □

Sofia Airport Invests in Security, Faster Handling of Passenger Flows

Sofia - Nearly 3.2 million leva will be invested this year to improve security at Sofia Airport, the Transport, IT and Communications Ministry said.

The investment is also linked with EU measures and procedures improving security and the handling of passenger flows at European airports as ordered by Transport Minister Aleksandar Tsvetkov.

More than 320 CCTV cameras are in place at the airport's two terminals. A further 130 cameras will be bought for the two terminals and other airport areas under a public procurement contract worth nearly 1.5 million leva.

Sofia Airport has launched a procedure to purchase and install 25 walk-through metal detectors worth about 700,000 leva. Ten X-ray screening machines worth about one million leva are due to be delivered.

The airport's revenues are the source of the investment. □

Access to Public Information Act Does not Work

Sofia - The Access to Public Information Act (APIA) is not working. Only 20 out of 495 web pages of institutions of the executive completely keep the requirements of APIA, a survey of the Access to Information Programme (AIP) presented at a BTA-hosted news conference on Wednesday shows.

The institutions are least transparent when it comes to publishing their budgets and financial statements for their activity, the AIP said. A total of 16 per cent of web pages checked had a budget of the institution published on them and

some 13 per cent had a financial statement.

Alexander Kashumov of AIP noted that it is not yet pressing to make changes to APIA. The tendency of silent denial of access to information continues, and there is no coordination between institutions. There are cases when the same piece of information is given by some institutions and not given by others, Kashumov said. He added that it is also necessary to reduce the amount of information that is classified as state secret and to limit the application of the official secret

as a means to limit the access to information.

According to AIP's analysis, it is pressing to empower an institution to monitor and coordinate the implementation of APIA, as well as to choose responsible individuals to impose sanctions in case of noncompliance with the law. The present legislation provides for that the institutions sanction themselves, which is not likely to happen, Kashumov noted. He added that so far there has not been a case of a state official sanctioned for denying access to information. □

Council of Ministers' Decisions

Sofia - At its regular meeting on Wednesday the Council of Ministers:

-- approved a bill amending and supplementing the Insurance Code. The bill scraps the labels attached on vehicles for third party liability insurance and the possibility to make the insurance payment in installments; instead, the payment will be made in one tranche. Failure to comply with the new requirements will carry a fine of 50 leva for the driver of the vehicle, and a fine of between 30,000 leva to 60,000 leva for the insurance company. A repeat offence will be fined between 60,000 leva and 120,000 leva;

-- adopted a Programme for Measures for Protection of Gifted Children in 2011. These children will receive a one-time financial support amounting to threefold of the guaranteed minimum income in Bulgaria;

-- approved the implementation of new projects to ensure an even higher degree of security of the Bulgarian border which is EU's external border. The projects include aerial observation of the borders of Bulgaria, ensuring the airworthiness of aircraft flying over sea and in winter conditions, enforcing the border control regime in the territorial sea and inland sea waters, tuning the base and mobile stations provided under the Schengen Facility, financing the project for Bulgaria's joining the SIS II system and EUCARIS, concerning the Pruem Convention;

-- approved the opening of a French Consulate in Plovdiv, South Central Bulgaria, headed by an honorary consular official. Alliance Francaise Plovdiv Director Teofana Mihailova Bradinska-Angelova was approved as Honorary Council of

the French Republic in Bulgaria;

-- endorsed an Intergovernmental Agreement on the Settling of the Zambian Government Debt between Bulgaria and Zambia. The agreement provides for a payback of Zambia's government debt with the payment of 23 per cent of the debt, which amounts to 8,200,455.88 dollars, and the transformation of the remaining 77 per cent in an official development assistance;

-- approved a draft temporary agreement about the status of the national Deployable Communications Module (DCM-F) of NATO which will be stationed in the area of the military unit in Gorna Malina, near Sofia. The module is part of NATO's Communication and Information Systems Services Agency, NCSA;

-- approved a Memorandum of Understanding between Bulgaria and Malta in the Sphere of Sea Transport and a draft Agreement on Mutual Protection and Exchange of Classified Information;

-- approved the position and the composition of the Bulgarian delegation to the 6th Session of the Bulgarian-Kuwaiti Joint Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation, which will take place on May 8-9 in Kuwait;

-- adopted a decree on the closure of the Transplantation Fund Centre;

-- proposed the National Assembly to ratify amendments to the Finance Contract between Bulgaria and the European Investment Bank on Bulgarian Railways;

-- approved a draft agreement with Croatia on police cooperation;

-- adopted changes to the rules of organization of the government aviation unit 28, setting forth rules for financing of specially commissioned flights. Under the effected changes, the costs will be paid by the first-level spending unit that

has commissioned the flight;

-- adopted the 2011 National Programme for preventing and countering human trafficking and for human trafficking victim protection;

-- adopted a tariff on fees collected by the Commission for Financial Supervision;

-- adopted changes to the implementing regulations to the Integration of Persons with Disabilities Act, reducing the time period for payment of social integration supplements;

-- moved changes to the Measures against the Financing of Terrorism Act, setting forth a legal definition of "financing of terrorism";

-- sponsored changes to the Social Assistance Act, setting up a Social Protection Fund as a successor to the existing Social Assistance Act;

-- sponsored changes to the Extradition and European Arrest Warrant Act and the Recognition, Execution and the Transmission of Confiscation and Seizure Orders and Decisions Imposing Financial Penalties Act, transposing a Council of Europe framework decision of 2009;

-- adopted a report on the implementation of the 2010 working programme under Bulgaria's Communication European Union Strategy, an international plan and a working programme for 2011;

-- motioned the President to appoint Colonel Zvezdomir Penkov deputy director of the National Intelligence Service;

-- adopted an ordinance on the provision of up to 70 million leva for 2010 national tobacco co-payments through the State Fund Agriculture. The money will be disbursed from allocations for national co-payments and the state budget;

-- approved the 2011/2012 fees at higher schools. □

Ambulance Service Needs Lv 150 Mln Annually

Sofia - Bulgaria's ambulance service should be financed with 150 million leva annually to ensure that it is timely and sufficient, Health Minister Stefan Konstantinov said on Wednesday, presenting a new concept for the development of the service. This year, ambulance stations are using a total budget of only 82 million leva, he noted.

The overall budget of the Health Ministry, which this year amounts to 700 million leva, could be redistributed to provide more money for ambulance service. Also, some am-

bulance service activities, such as transportation between two medical treatment facilities, could be financed through the National Health Insurance Fund, Konstantinov said.

According to the new concept, ambulance response time should be no more than 20 minutes under normal circumstances; if the patient is in a remote area, the time limit may be 30 minutes.

The proposed changes can be implemented over a period of three to five years, provided that there is a political will to do that, the Minis-

ter said.

The capital Sofia is serviced by no more than 30 ambulance crews daily, the Health Ministry's Ivelina Georgieva said. Ambulance nurses and doctors need to be better paid, according to Minister Konstantinov. A nurse should be able to earn at least 720 leva monthly, and doctors should be paid as much as their colleagues in outpatient care.

The main problems in ambulance service are false alarms, a staff shortage, and a lack of clear rules, Konstantinov said. □

Property Tax Money in Sofia in January-April 2011 Increases by 1.4 Million Leva from Like Period in 2010

Sofia - The money paid in for property tax in Sofia in January-April 2011 is by 1.4 million leva more than in the like period in 2010, the Sofia City Hall said.

A total of 36.2 million leva were paid in the first four months of 2011, against 36.8 million leva in 2010. The end of April was the deadline when the tax could be paid with a 5 per cent discount.

Revenue from the waste collection fee stood at 63.7 million leva, against 68.8 million leva in the like period in 2010. Experts explained the difference with a delay in paying the fee by economic entities on account of the downturn. The experts said that additional teams will be deployed to check the due amounts for local taxes and fees of legal persons.

The greatest increase in terms of percentage, 207 per cent, was in the amount of cash from fees, sanctions and penalty interest, which increased from 172,668 leva in 2010 to 357,388 leva in January-April 2011. The amount of paid in tourist tax, which replaced the tourist fee, stood at 442,391 leva this year, against 329,000 leva in 2010.

Motor taxes stood at 39.323 million leva in 2011, against 41.854 million leva in 2010.

A total of 42,570 leva were paid in as dog fee, which is 24 per cent of the target amount.

A total of 5.238 million leva were paid in as building permit fees, which is 4 per cent more than the target amount.

As at the end of April the Sofia City Hall returned nearly 180,000 leva in overcharged amounts for property taxes and waste collection fees after the planned re-zoning of the city was repealed.

The total amount of paid in revenue is 38.79 per cent of the planned 428.720 million leva. □



Poli Genova representing Bulgaria performs during the rehearsal for the second semi-final of the Eurovision Song Contest in Duesseldorf, Germany
EPA Photo

Cocaine Seized at Kalotina

Sofia - Cocaine worth over 50,000 leva has been seized by customs officers at the Kalotina checkpoint on the Bulgarian-Serbian border. The drug was found in three packages in the airconditioner of a Bulgarian-registered Fiat. In the car were a 33-year-old man and a 24-year-old woman. The competent authorities are handling the case. □

Exhibition of Pioneer Spanish Photojournalist Comes to Bulgaria

Sofia - Photos of Spanish photojournalist Luis Ramon Marin will be featured in a special exhibition in Sofia, the host, Cervantes Institute in Sofia, said Wednesday. "Reports from the past: 1908 - 1940. Spain through the eyes of photographer Luis Ramon Marin" will open on May 12. The exhibition will feature 67 black-and-white photos.

Luis Ramon Marin (1884-1944), a pioneer of Spanish photojournalism, is one of the most important photographers of his country. His work covers a wide range, including

pictures of the royal family, scenes of daily life in Madrid and countless portraits of intellectuals, artists, and sporting personalities.

But Marin's photos also tell of dark chapters in Spanish history - suffering refugees, the military, destroyed cities and war scenarios. After the end of the Spanish Civil War his pictures were no longer published in Spanish newspapers, lapsed into public oblivion and were thought for a long time to have disappeared without trace.

It was only after the death of

Marin's widow that the photographer's family found the works hidden in her flat, made them accessible to the general public and so saved this valuable heritage from the threat of destruction. Since then, the archive containing more than 18,000 works of Luis Ramon Marin has been in the keeping of the Pablo Iglesias Foundation.

Ramon's daughter, Lucia Ramon Pla, and the curator of the exhibition from the Pablo Iglesias Foundation, Oscar Martin will be in Bulgaria for the opening of the show. □

Construction of Housing, Administrative Buildings Declines

Sofia - In the first quarter of 2011, municipal authorities issued building permits for construction of 951 residential buildings with 2,458 housing units and 320,010 sq m gross building area, 37 administrative buildings/offices with 21,907 sq m gross building area and 954 other buildings with 631,784 sq m gross building area, the National Statistical Institute said. As compared to the previous quarter, the building permits for residential buildings decreased by 17.4 per cent, the number of housing units - by 9.1 per cent and the gross building area - by 15.3 per cent. Administrative buildings dropped by 28.8 per cent and their gross building area - by 29.2 per cent. The other buildings fell by 13.9 per cent, but their gross building area rose by 3.7 per cent.

As compared to the first quarter of 2010, the building permits issued for new residential buildings decreased by 3.6 per cent, and housing units - by 11.9 per cent. The administrative buildings fell by 24.5 per cent, while the other buildings increased by 9.9 per cent. A drop in the gross building area was registered in the case of residential buildings - by 10.7 per cent and in that of administrative buildings - by 54.3 per cent, while other buildings showed an increase of 51.2 per cent.

The highest number of building permits for new residential buildings was issued in the following regions: Sofia (capital) - 112, Burgas - 111, Plovdiv - 92, Sofia - 90 and Varna - 84. The construction of most housing units is to be launched in the following regions: Burgas - 637, Plovdiv - 348, Varna - 302 and Sofia (capital) - 210.

In the first quarter of 2011, construction began of 459 residential buildings with 1,540 housing units and 194,892 sq m gross building area, of 26 administrative buildings/offices with 14,092 sq m gross building area and 409 other buildings with 208,830 sq m gross building area. As compared to the previous quarter, the number of construction launched residential buildings decreased by 24.9 per cent, the housing units in them - by 32.6 per cent and the gross building area - by 26.5 per cent. The launched administrative buildings rose by 8.3 per cent, but their gross building area fell by 0.5 per cent. The number of other buildings decreased by 13.3 per cent and their gross building area - by 4.7 per cent.

As compared to the first quarter of 2010, the number of launched new residential buildings decreased by 0.6 per cent, and the housing units in them - by 6.8 per cent. The number of administrative buildings fell by 16.1 per cent, while the other buildings rose by 23.2 per cent. A decrease in the gross building area was registered in the residential buildings - by 7.5 per cent and in the administrative buildings - by 55.0 per cent, while in the other buildings showed an increase by 21.5 per cent.

The highest number of construction of new buildings were started in the districts: Burgas - 77 residential buildings and 59 other buildings; Varna - 55 residential buildings and 28 other buildings; Plovdiv - 45 residential buildings, 3 administrative buildings and 40 other buildings; Sofia (capital) - 43 residential buildings, 4 administrative buildings and 18 other buildings. □

Exchange Rates

Sofia - The Bulgarian National Bank sets the rates of foreign currencies against the Bulgarian lev applicable from 5 p.m. on May 4 to 5 p.m. on May 5, 2011. 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 4 - May 5 , 2011			
CURRENCY	ISO CODE	FOR	LEVA
AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR	AUD	1	1.42481
BRAZILIAN REAL	BRL	10	8.29480
CANADIAN DOLLAR	CAD	1	1.37977
SWISS FRANC	CHF	1	1.52489
CHINESE YUAN RENMINBI	CNY	10	2.02391
CZECH KORUNA	CZK	100	8.07894
DANISH KRONE	DKK	10	2.62288
BRITISH POUND	GBP	1	2.17339
HONG KONG DOLLAR	HKD	10	1.69156
CROATIAN KUNA	HRK	10	2.64964
HUNGARIAN FORINT	HUF	1,000	7.38941
INDONESIAN RUPIAH	IDR	10,000	1.53675
IZRAELI SHEKEL	ILS	10	3.87178
INDIAN RUPIAH	INR	100	2.95532
ICELANDIC KRONA *	ISK		
JAPANESE YEN	JPY	100	1.62148
SOUTH KOREAN WON	KRW	1,000	1.22509
LITHUANIAN LITAS	LTL	10	5.66448
LATVIAN LAT	LVL	1	2.75663
MEXICAN PESO	MXN	10	1.13596
MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	MYR	1	4.41457
NORWEGIAN KRONE	NOK	10	2.48486
NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	NZD	1	1.04144
PHILIPPINE PESO	PHP	100	3.06249
POLISH ZLOTY	PLN	10	4.96832
NEW ROMANIAN LEU	RON	10	4.75871
RUSSIAN ROUBLE	RUB	100	4.82564
SWEDISH KRONA	SEK	10	2.17061
SINGAPOREAN DOLLAR	SGD	10	1.07081
THAI BAHT	THB	100	4.38517
NEW TURKISH LIRA	TRY	10	8.54933
US DOLLAR	USD	1	1.31423
SOUTH AFRICAN RAND	ZAR	10	1.97924
GOLD	XAU	1 troy ounce	2,020.82

*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 5**

• **The world:**

- Council of Europe Day
- Protest Day for Equal Rights for Disabled People
- National Day of Kyrgyzstan. Constitution Day (since 1993).

• **On this day in Bulgarian history:**

1876 - The first issue of "Nova Bulgaria" (New Bulgaria) newspaper published by Bulgarian poet and revolutionary Hristo Botev comes out in Bucharest.

1949 - Bulgaria Concert Hall opens, rebuilt after WWII bombing.

1981 - First International Spring Fair opens in Plovdiv with the participation of 481 foreign companies from 40 countries.

1992 - The National Assembly ratifies the Statute of the Council of Europe.

2004 - Sofia Mayor Stefan Sofiyanski is removed from office by the City Court. He is charged with grossly underpricing the Central Market Hall on setting up a joint venture with Israel's Ashtrom in 1998. The municipality made an in-kind contribution to the JV. □

Weather Forecast

May 5: Rains to stop before noon in Western Bulgaria, giving way to clear weather. The cool front will continue to spread. After a brief interval, rains will continue in Eastern Bulgaria. Lows: 6C to 11C. Highs:

12C to 17C.

Source: The National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. □

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