

General Information

population: 7 973 671
area: 110 993 sq. km
language: Bulgarian
religion: Orthodox
summer temperatures: 26° to 30°C
winter temperatures: -5° to 5°C
time zone: GMT +2 (Apr-Sept GMT +3)
country dialing code: 00 359
internet country code: .bg
capital: Sofia (Pop. 1 173 811)
president: Georgi Parvanov

Administrative Division

28 regions and 262 municipalities.

Capital

Sofia (1 173 988 citizens)

Principal Cities:

Plovdiv (338 302), Varna (320 668), Bourgas (209 479), Rousse (178 435), Stara Zagora (167 708), Pleven (149 174), Sliven (136 148), Dobrich (100 000), Shumen (104 473), Pernik (104 626), Yambol (82 656), Haskovo (99 181).

Climate

The climate is moderate continental with Mediterranean influence to the South. The average annual temperature is 10,5 degrees Celsius. Four seasons are distinctly expressed - winter, spring, summer and autumn. January is the coldest month of the year. July and August are the hottest summer months and sometimes temperatures go above 30 degrees Celsius.

Communication

The country offers a well-developed highway network, including six international highways, which meet international standards and link Europe with the Orient, and the North with the South. Four out of the ten Trans-European corridors cross the territory of Bulgaria - IV, VIII, IX and X. Petrol stations on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria offer petrol with octane numbers 92, 98 and 95 H- unleaded, as well as diesel fuel. There are petrol stations at each FCPP, along international and secondary roads, and in towns and villages. Inter-city and long distance bus transport is also well developed. A number of private companies have been founded

for the last several years and they offer services to almost every destination in the country and abroad. Urban transport services are provided mainly by bus lines, trolley buses and tramways. Railway roads - 4 292 km, the better part of which are electric power operated.

Currency

Bulgarian Lev is pegged to the EURO (EURO 1 = BGN 1,95583). Presently coins in circulation is issued in 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50 stotinki and 1 lev. Paper currency comes in 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 leva.

Economy

Before the changes in Eastern Europe, the country was entirely dependent of the Soviet Union and the socialist block. A positive change began in 1997, when the currency board system was introduced in Bulgaria, i.e. the national currency (BGN) was fixed to the German Mark, and later to the Euro. Thanks to the strict monetary discipline of the currency board in combination with a series of reforms, the economic system was stabilized and the restoration process was initiated. In the recent years the development of the national economy has speeded up considerably, seeing an average GDP growth of 4.5% between 1998 and 2005. In 2005, GDP growth reached 5.5%, in 2006 – 6,1 %, in 2007 – 6,2 %. This growth has been driven by increased foreign investments, domestic consumption and exports. The foreign investments inflows in Bulgaria were the highest in the whole of Central and Eastern Europe in both 2003 and 2004 and remained high in 2005 (Euro 1.9 bn), 2006 (Euro 4 bn) and 2007 (Euro 6,1 bn). As a result, today Bulgaria is among the best investments options.

Flora and fauna

Bulgaria is rich in places where nature has been preserved almost unspoiled and vegetation demonstrates remarkable diversity. A total of 12 360 species have been found in its composition. The Bulgarian endemic plants, which are to be found nowhere else in the world, number more than 250 species: Rila Primrose, Balkan Violet, Bulgarian Blackberry, Rhodope Tulip, etc. Forests abound with various wild fruit - all of them of proven flavour. There is also a great diversity of herbs. Bulgaria's fauna numbers more than 13,000 species. Rare mammal species are also to be found in the country.

History

The Bulgarian state was founded in 681 AD as a union of new-settled Proto-Bulgarians, Slavs and with the participation of the local Balkan people and Thracians.

In 855 B.C. was created the Slavic alphabet. It was named Cyrillic alphabet

and was corresponding to perfection to the phonetic riches of the Slavonic-Bulgarian language. Today more than 50 peoples write in Cyrillic, and together with the Latin and Arabic it is one of the three international alphabets.

Tsar Boris I converted the state to Orthodox Christianity in 864. This First Bulgarian State, which stretched from Transylvania in the north to the Aegean Sea in the south and from the Black Sea in the east to the Adriatic Sea in the west, fell to the Byzantines in 1018.

The Second Bulgarian State, established in 1185 at Veliko Turnovo, reinstated the borders and a Golden Age began in which Bulgaria bordered on three seas. From 1396 to 1878 the country was under the rule ('yoke' as the Bulgarians call it) of the Ottoman Turks.

Sofia became the capital of Bulgaria after the Veliko Turnovo Constitution was accepted in 1879. From 1878 (liberation from the Turks) to 1944, Bulgaria enjoyed a brief but unstable period of freedom. After 1944 the Communist Party, led by Georgi Dimitrov, took power and proclaimed Bulgaria a People's Republic in 1946. The oppressive Communist rule lasted till November 10th, 1989 when Bulgaria peacefully ousted the Party leader Todor Zhivkov and declared itself as a Democratic Republic.

Location and territory

Bulgaria is located in South-Eastern Europe and occupies the Eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula. To the North, the country borders on Romania via the Danube River, to the East it touches the Black Sea, its southern neighbours are Turkey and Greece, and to the West it borders on the Republic of Macedonia and Serbia. The total territory of the country is 110 993 sq. km and Bulgaria ranks 15th in size among the other European countries.

Official language

The official language is Bulgarian and the official alphabet is Cyrillic. The Bulgarian language belongs to the group of the Slavonic languages. Serbo-Croatian and Russian are the most similar languages to it. Macedonian is Bulgarian dialect in fact. Other languages as English, German, French, Russian and Spanish are spoken by 40 % of the population.

Politics

One of the first sign of Bulgaria's democratization after 1989 was the establishment of multiparty system. At the end of 2004 the total number of registered political parties in the country exceeds 300. Nowadays the number of actively functioning and publicity endorsed parties is 16. At the last parliamentary elections of June 25, 2005, the Bulgarian Socialist Party won the highest number of seats (82), followed by the coalition National

Movement Simeon II (53) and Movements for Rights and Freedoms (34). All 3 leading parties formed a stable government. This grand coalition has a large majority in parliament with 169 of the 240 deputies. Bulgaria has joined NATO on March 29, 2004 and it has joined recently the EU (1st of January 2007).

Population and ethnic groups

Bulgaria is a country with a population of almost 8 millions people. Until the middle of the last century three quarters of the population lived in the villages. At the end of the century, as a result of the last industrialization and the migration to the cities, the ratio has reserved and today 70% is urban population.

With its 1,5 million residents the capital city Sofia is the biggest in Bulgaria. There are seven cities with more than 100 thousand population where nearly of third of the entire population of the country lives. Another 14 towns have between 50 and 100 thousand residents. The proportion between women and men in Bulgaria is 51,4 % to 48,6 %. The smaller share of men is due to their shorter life expectancy, and therefore is sharper in the age groups of over 50 years.

According to the 2001 census, 83,9 % of the people in Bulgaria are ethnic Bulgarians, and the biggest minorities are the ethnic Turks (9,4%) and the Roma (4,7%). The remaining 2% include smaller minorities like Armenians, Russians, Romanians, Ukrainians, Greeks and Jews.

The majority of the adult Bulgarians have secondary or higher education and among the people between 25 and 64 years of age their share is over two-third.

Relief

The country's relief is varied (from 0 to 2,925 m above the sea level) and about 60 percent of the territory are hilly and mountainous. The most famous mountains are: Rila (with the highest mountain peak on the Balkan Peninsula - Mussala - 2 925 m), Pirin (peak Vihren - 2 914 m), the Central Balkan (peak Botev - 2 376 m), the Rhodope Mountains (peak Golyam Perelik - 2 191 m) and Vitosha Mountain near Sofia (peak Cherni Vrah - 2 290 m). Numerous natural phenomena are scattered across the country: mountain passes and gorges rock-pyramids and bizarre rock formations, numerous caves and waterfalls, beautiful lakes. Some of the most famous are: the Melnik Pyramids, the Fossil Forest, the Belogradchik Rocks; the gorges of the rivers Trigradska in the Rhodopes and Erma near the town of Tran, Vratsata; the valleys of the rivers Iskar, Struma and Mesta, the canyon of the Roussenski Lom River; the Srebarna Lake; the rock monastery Aladja off the city of Varna, etc. There is a great diversity of karst forms, among these some 4,500 caves. The deepest cave in Bulgaria is Raichova Dupka (387 m deep), and the longest is Duhlata (17,600 m long).

The best known are: the Ledenika, the Magurata and the Saeva Dupka Caves in the Balkan range; the Snezhanka, the Yagodinskata, the Dyavolsko Garlo, and the Uhlovitsa Caves - in the Rhodope Mountains.

Religion

Full freedom of the religious denominations is proclaimed in the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria. Eastern Orthodox Christians - 82,6 % of the population; Islam - 12,2 %; Other religions - 1,3 % including Catholics (43 811), Protestants (42 308), Armenians (6 500), Judeans (653) and without any specific religious denomination - 3,9 %

State system

Bulgaria is a republic with parliamentary form of government. The Constitution of the republic of Bulgaria, adopted on July 13, 1991, proclaims the country as an integral state with local government, and it contains no provisions for autonomous territorial formations. The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria is the supreme law of the country and no other law can be inconsistent with it.

Waters

There are about 500 mineral water deposits in Bulgaria with more than 1,600 springs. These are located mainly at the foothills of mountains. The spa resorts of national significance are Bankya, Velingrad, Sandanski, the mineral baths of Stara Zagora, Narechen, Sliven and Haskovo, as well as in Kyustendil, Varshets, Hissarya, Merichleri, Momin Prohod and Kostenets. Beautiful lakes lie hidden in the cirques of Rila and Pirin Mountains.