

# T(H)RACING THE BULGARIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL



ARCTURUSGROUP

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# INTERVIEW OF MEP EVA MAYDELL (EPP, BG)

## Priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council

As a member of the 'trio Presidency' with Estonia and Austria, will Bulgaria bring some new/other topics/priorities apart from the ongoing top ones – i.e. migration, the future of cohesion policy, and the digital single market? Are there some concrete steps forward the country is looking for?

First and foremost, the success of every EU presidency is not measured by the number of new initiatives and own agenda input, but by the number of successfully completed legislation. That is why the top priority for our presidency will be one - hard work. My colleagues here and in Sofia are aware of the tough moments that Europe is going through. Those are the need for unity in the Brexit negotiations, the need for improving our asylum and migration policy and especially the Dublin System, as well as the expected MFF<sup>1</sup> and the need to maintain cohesion and solidarity for all European regions and populations with tighter budgetary constraints.

Bulgaria has no hidden agenda but would like to draw attention to one very dynamic and important (for all of us) region – the Western Balkans. We need to realise that despite the challenges that it overcomes the EU still attracts the aspiration of those countries and therefore we need to provide tangible perspective for their closer integration with the EU. We have already identified some concrete spheres where work should start – deepening regional cooperation, connectivity of the region with the rest of Europe and good neighbour relationships.



Eva MAYDELL

1 MFF: Multiannual Financial Framework

Such as its predecessor, it is the very first time Bulgaria is taking over the presidency of the Council. Do you consider this aspect to be a strength or weakness? What kind of vision could Bulgaria bring to other Members States?

Being a newcomer to the job can be really challenging as we need to build the routine and master the procedural aspects of steering the EU. At the same time, I rather see this as a positive feature – our minister for the EU presidency, Ms Lilyana Pavlova and her team are very enthusiastic and devoted to demonstrating professionalism and moving the European agenda forward. Our vision of Europe is one of consensus, cohesion and competitiveness while paying attention to the role and opinion of young people for the future of Europe.

Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, being one of the latest Member States. From your point of view, what are the main benefits you observed since the adhesion?

The benefits are visible in every aspect of life – from infrastructural projects and consumer protection to improved businesses and investment in environmental issues as well as better regulation enforcement. What really matters however is the sense of optimism and support which EU membership provides and the readiness to share EU common values.

How is Brexit experienced by Bulgaria? Does Bulgaria, as a 'young' member of the EU, watch it as an aberration, a danger, a logical consequence, an opportunity?

For Bulgaria, as for the rest of the EU, the decision of the UK to leave the EU has been a great source of concern and disappointment. This has however not shaken our own Euro-optimism. I hope that we will manage to honour the decision of referendum while solving the potential problems for EU citizens – ensuring rights of those citizens who remain in the UK after Brexit, the hard border question with Ireland and mutually-beneficial trade relations.

National Elections recently took place in two key EU countries: Germany and France. How do you feel about the results and the proven rise of extremist parties in both countries? Is populism a real threat to European values?

As newly elected president of the European Movement International, I can only salute results in which pro-European and moderate political parties win the elections

with clearly distinguishable European electoral campaign slogans. To be able to take more united course on the EU together we need sound and working ruling coalitions. That is why my attention is now focused on Germany. As to populism, I believe that all of us - politicians from the established centrist parties - have already understood that populism should be fought on several fronts - by engaging with the questions that such parties raise, by providing concrete and fact-based answers and by making our communication closer to the citizens.





Bulgaria has three of the youngest MEPs for this mandate of the European Parliament. How do you feel about that? Did you face some problems related to this? Is it a coincidence? Are there any reasons to this? Does it mean Bulgarian people are getting more interested in the EU in general?

I hope that we are provoking more interest to the EU in Bulgaria. Young leadership has always been something that my political party has promoted and something that many Bulgarians value. Young politicians are also better placed to fit the dynamic job of an MEP and are well-armoured to argue with populists.

Bulgaria has somehow what we can call a troubled past – having faced Ottoman's invasions and URSS dominance. Considering those aspects, how do you feel about/do you see your country nowadays? What is, in your opinion, the greatest achievement of Bulgaria in its history?

Despite external invasions for long centuries, Bulgaria has preserved its language and traditions. The Cyrillic alphabet is a Bulgarian contribution to the world heritage. It was created at the end of the 9th and the beginning of the 10th century.

Could you tell us about one original tradition in Bulgaria?

Nestinari – it is an old pagan dance honouring orthodox saints. The dancers perform the dance barefoot over fire embers accompanied by the music of drums and bagpipes.

If I had to spend 48 hours in Sofia, no more no less, what shouldn't I absolutely miss out on?

The people. Sofia is a multi-cultural and fast-growing city, with a young and creative feature. In the core of all, there is an artistic vibe to its people.

In your opinion, who is the Bulgarian celebrity, writer, singer, or anyone else, everyone should know about?

I could think of many. As every country Bulgaria has its talented writers, actors and singers. I recently invited in Brussels a remarkable Bulgarian - an alpinist who is on his way to conquer all 14 peaks above 8.000 meters in the world. He does that to motivate his compatriots and uses no oxygen aid on his way to the top - Mr Boyan Petrov.

# PRIORITIES OF THE BULGARIAN PRESIDENCY

From January 1st to June 30th, 2018, Bulgaria will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first time since its accession ten years ago. It will oversee the last legislative initiatives of the JUNCKER Commission which should be tabled by May 2018 (except for the Common Agricultural Policy reform scheduled for late May/June). Bulgaria will also be responsible for leading the negotiations on many highly sensitive files such as the modernisation of the transport sector, the protection of digital communication, the preparation of the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) post-2020, as well as the completion of the Energy and Banking Unions.

- Building consensus on the most political sensitive issues
- Improving the competitiveness of the Single Market
- Promoting a more cohesive Europe

While the EU is confronted with the United Kingdom's withdrawal and the failure of government coalition talks in Germany, Bulgaria identified three main principles that will guide its actions:



A major element of the trio Presidency (Estonia, Bulgaria, and Austria) is to swiftly reach agreements on the major Commission's proposals aimed at completing the Digital Single Market, such as the ePrivacy Directive, the Electronic Communications Code and the free flow of data. Bulgaria also considers that greater attention must be paid to fostering early childhood development and strengthening social inclusion through formal and informal learning.

**01**  
DIGITAL  
ECONOMY



Given the geopolitical context, security and migration remain a top priority. Therefore great emphasis will be given to strengthening the border controls and improving the exchange of security data between the EU and national authorities.

**02**  
SECURITY



Bulgaria wishes to take advantage of its Presidency and the Brexit to bring the Western Balkan countries closer to the EU and to accelerate their potential integration. It also aims to bring more EU funding to the region.

**03**  
EUROPEAN  
UNITY



The incoming Presidency wants to exploit the current positive economic situation in Europe to ensure that all Member States' economies will continue to grow. To this end, it will conduct a broad debate on the MFF post-2020.

**04**  
SOCIAL  
INCLUSION

# POLITICAL CALENDAR FOR THE NEXT SIX MONTHS

## 01 | JANUARY

### Fair taxation package III

Including proposals for Council Directives on the common system of VAT for SMEs and on the rules governing the setting of VAT rates.

### Czech Republic : Presidential election

On January 12th and 13th, the Czech Republic will hold its second presidential election by direct universal suffrage in its history. Although the Constitution limits the President's function, he has a greater role than initially intended. Current President, Milos ZEMAN, is said to have great chance of re-election. If no candidate reaches an absolute majority, a second round will take place on January 26th and 27th.

### Cyprus: Presidential election

Current President Nicos ANASTASIADES is presented as the favourite in Cyprus' 2018 Presidential election, which will take place on January 28th. In the event of a run-off, the second round would be on February 4th. ANASTASIADES' main opponent will most probably be Nicolas PAPAPOPOULOS.

### Finland: Presidential election

Although there are seven candidates current President, Sauli NIINISTÖ, is dominating the polls. The popular head of State is estimated to have 67% of voter support. However, the President's power is not as high as they used to be. Indeed, Finland changed its semi-presidential system in favour of a parliamentary republic a few decades ago. This first round will take place on January 28th while the run-off is set for February 11th.

## 02 | FEBRUARY

### **Bulgaria**

Informal meeting of Heads of States and Governments in Sofia, Bulgaria, regarding the next Multi-annual Financial Framework (February 23rd)

Towards a larger EU Strategy for a successful EU accession of Serbia & Montenegro?

## 04 | APRIL

Proposal to improve the EU food supply chain

### **Hungary: Parliamentary elections**

Hungary will hold Parliamentary elections in April, indirectly electing its next Prime Minister. The favourite for elections appears to be Viktor ORBAN, in power since 2010.

## 03 | MARCH

Capital Markets Union package (including an Action Plan on sustainable finance with regulatory measures)

Proposals related to the taxation of the digital economy

Initiative on protection of whistle-blowers

### **Italy: general election**

Italy will elect its members from both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The election is set to be taking place no later than May 2018, most likely in March. We may see the emergence of a new Prime Minister as Silvio BERLUSCONI's party Forza Italia is currently leading the poll with 35% of estimated votes. Ex-PM Matteo RENZI's Democratic Party and Eurosceptic Five-Star Movement are second and third with respectively 30% and 28%.

## 05 | MAY

Third Mobility Package (including CO2 emissions for lorries)

EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia (May 17th)

Multi-annual Financial Framework beyond 2020 package

## 06 | JUNE

European Council Decision on the composition of the European Parliament for the 2019 – 2024 parliamentary term

European Council Decisions on the reform of the Economic and Monetary Union

EU Heads of State or Government will review progress on the implementation of the Leaders' Agenda established by Donald TUSK, President of the European Council



What better way for Bulgaria to celebrate its 10-year membership to the European Union than holding the Council Presidency for its first time since its adhesion in 2007.

## GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

- While the country has a population of just over 7 million inhabitants, it is also very populated ... by trees! Indeed, it is estimated that about one third of Bulgaria's land is covered by forests.
- Bulgaria is part of the Balkans countries or Balkan Peninsula, a geographic region situated in South-East Europe. The term 'Balkan' means 'wooded mountain chain' in Turkish. There is in fact a Balkan Mountain range passing through central Bulgaria.
- With Bulgaria's adhesion, the Cyrillic alphabet became the third official alphabet of the EU (with Latin and Greek).

## HISTORY

Few people actually know that Bulgaria is a quite old country with a genuine history. The 9th century particularly represents its golden age, with:

- The adoption of Christianity (Bulgarian orthodoxy) as the official religion in 865
- The birth of Bulgaria in 681, when the country was recognized by the Byzantine Empire
- The creation of the Cyrillic alphabet by Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius (following the demand of Boris I, King of Bulgaria) in 885.
- Both Saints are still celebrated nowadays on May 24, a public holiday in Bulgaria (culture and literacy day).

Bulgaria celebrates Independence Day on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September, marking its emancipation from the Ottomans in 1908. After more than 40 years of Soviet influence during the post-WWII era, the country adopted a new constitution in 1991, proclaiming Bulgaria a Parliamentary Republic.

А Б В Г Д Е Ж З И  
Й К Л М Н О П Р С  
Т У Ф Х Ц Ч Ш Щ Ъ  
Ь Ю Я

## TOURIST TIPS : FOOD, DRINKS & PLACES

Also known as Bulgarian Salad, it is a very popular dish throughout the Balkans, especially in Bulgaria, Serbia and Macedonia. As well as being delicious, it is very easy to make! All you will need is: tomatoes, cucumbers, roasted or raw peppers, an onion, fresh parsley and crumbled Bulgarian sirene cheese. Bon appétit!



## St Alexander Nevsky Cathedral

### Sveti Aleksandar Nevski Square

The Cathedral is one of the largest Eastern Orthodox cathedrals in the world. Designed in the neo-Byzantine style, it was built from 1882 to 1912 to honour those who sacrificed their lives during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 which liberated Bulgaria from the Ottomans.



## Russian Church of St Nicholas the Miracle-Maker

### 3 Tsar Osvoboditel Bvd.

Situated right next to the St Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, the Russian Church was built in 1914 in Russian revival style. It is a reminder of the close historical ties of Russia and Bulgaria. The Church was named after the Russian monarch at the time, Tsar Nicholas II, who donated the bells.



## Sense Hotel Rooftop Bar

### 16 Tsar Osvoboditel Bvd.

Situated right behind St Alexander Nevsky's Cathedral, this rooftop offers a unique view on Sofia and its famous golden dome church. Don't forget to wear a nice dress/shirt, the dress code is smart casual!

## One More Bar

### 12 Tsar Shishman St.

Branded as one of the coolest locations by locals, the bar is particularly famous for its cocktails. A terrace is available during summer. The only downside: the place closes at 2 AM. If you want to keep partying, go to the Tobbaco Garden Bar! Situated just behind the former Royal Palace, it is open 24-hour.



## Made in Blue

### 6 Yuri Venelin St.

'What is so special about this place?' you might wonder. Well, the first thing is the exterior: the restaurant is in fact an old house, painted in blue, with an artsy-retro look. The food is also out of the ordinary: you won't find traditional meals there but instead original and innovative menus.

## Pod Lipite

### 1 Elin Pelin St.

On the other hand, if you want a real taste of Bulgarian cuisine, this is the place to go! The restaurant, opened as a wish to reconnect with the past, the history and tradition, offers a rather large choice of traditional meals.

## FUN FACTS



**JOHN VINCENT ATANASOFF**

John Vincent Atanasoff was a physicist and inventor of Bulgarian descent, best known for inventing the first electronic digital computer

**YES  
NO!**

Bulgarians nod their heads to say no and shake their heads to say yes

Bulgaria has not changed its name since its foundation in 681

# Bulgaria



Bulgaria's 'Rose Valley' produces most (70-85%) of the world's rose oil – a component in nearly every fragrance

Lactobacillus Bulgaricus, the bacterium that is responsible for giving Bulgarian yoghurt its unique flavour and consistency, can be found only in Bulgarian air



## SPORTS



Hristo Stoichkov received the Ballon d'Or in 1994. He is the only Bulgarian player to ever have received this award.

In 2004, Stoichkov

became one of the FIFA 100 list of the world's greatest living players.

Bulgarian tennis player Grigor Dimitrov – often nicknamed 'Baby Federer' – won the 2017 London Masters and will end the year with the highest ranking of his career, No. 3.



## SOME USEFUL WORDS

Bulgarian is an Indo-European language, a member of the Southern branch of the Slavic language family.



Hello! **Здравей!** (Zdravei) (singular)

Hello! **Здравейте!** (Zdraveite) (plural)

Goodbye **Довиждане** (Dojivane)

Good morning **Добро утро** (Dobro utro)

Good evening **Приятна вечер** (Priatna vecher)

Thank you **Благодаря** (Blagodaria)

Excuse me! **Извинете** (Izvinette)

Sorry **Съжалявам** (Sajaliavam)

Please **Моля** (Molia)

One language is never enough **Един език не е достатъчен**

(Edin ezik ne e dostatachen)

I only speak a few words of Bulgarian **Знам само няколко думи на български**

(Znam samo niakolko dumi na bulgarski)

One beer, please! **Една бира, моля** (Edna bira, molia)



# THRACIANS

Thracians are an ancient Indo-European ethnic group, who occupied the Southeastern part of the Balkan Peninsula, including modern Bulgaria. They were considered by their adversaries – the Greeks and the Romans – as uneducated and wild barbarians.

There are several mentions of the Thracians in the Greek mythology. The Iliad (13th – 12th centuries BC), written by Greek poet Homer, is seen as the group's first historical record. He described them as powerful warriors, allied of the Trojan during the famous Trojan War.



One of the most famous Greek myths includes Thracian musician Orpheus. He is well known both as the most talented music player of his time but also for his famous love story with Eurydice, whom he rescued from the Underworld after her death.

As Homer depicted, Thracians were famous for their warrior skills. Thus, it is no surprise that they were also renowned gladiators, easily recognizable by their metal helmet and curved sword. Spartacus is probably the most memorable gladiator in history, remembered for leading the slaves' revolt against the Romans.

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