

ISSUE 1/FREE

ZOOM

BULGARIA

The official magazine of Radio Bulgaria

Refugee wave and
Bulgarians' compassion

Bulgaria focuses on Asia as
export destination

Pironkova wins her
maiden WTA title

IT'S CARNIVAL TIME...



A winter fairy tale

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BULGARIA



The Bulgarian National Radio celebrates its 79th birthday with three national broadcast channels and seven regional radio stations, a new web portal where you can find news and various materials in 11 languages as well as the multimedia platform

Binar. This media palette will now be enriched with the monthly magazine of the BNR.

ZOOM BULGARIA is aimed at foreign visitors to this country who would be able to find here an in-depth look into the current developments in Bulgaria's economy, politics, contemporary life, sports, and also insights into Bulgarian history, culture and traditions. On the pages of the magazine, people would be able to read features that are part of the daily webcasts of Radio Bulgaria - the world Internet program of the public media. If the stories and topics in this edition appeal to you and attract your attention, <http://bnr.bg/radiobulgaria> is your stop on the web!

Have an enjoyable read!

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Bulgaria focuses on Asia as export destination



Bulgaria's Economy and Energy Minister, Dragomir Stoynev, has announced that the State was going to focus on directing its exports to Asia. He motivated his words with economic growth across Asia and designated as potential trade partners Vietnam, the Emirates, Qatar and the former Soviet Republics, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan.

One of the state's top priorities is to encourage Bulgarian exports. The companies who operate on foreign markets will be encouraged to export mostly to countries of high economic growth.

For the purpose, the Bulgarian Ministry of Economy and Energy has opened offices in Kyiv, Brussels, Rome, Beijing and other big cities worldwide.

The Ministry of Economy and Energy has confirmed that trade-economic sections at Bulgarian embassies across the world will be restructured. Part of the sections in EU countries will be closed down and their commercial attaches – redirected to new representations in promising countries in Asia and the Middle East. Bulgaria is going to open new trade missions in China, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Armenia, Uzbekistan and others.

Forty three cruise ships expected at Southern portion of Bulgaria's Black Sea coast in 2014 *by Veneta Nikolova*

Last year the Black Sea towns of Bourgas and Nessebar proved to be a popular destination for cruise ships. This was made possible after the new passenger terminal at Port Bourgas became operational. Now that larger vessels are able to land here, the city of Bourgas on the Southern portion of the Black Sea coastline has become far more popular as a port. Together with Nessebar nearby, which also has a good port, in 2014 Bourgas is preparing to welcome 43 liners.

Almost 20,000 passengers passed through the Southern Bulgarian Black Sea coastline during the cruise season last year. Five cruise ships have landed at the Bourgas Marine Terminal since it was renovated. The biggest of them is Celebrity Constellation, owned by Royal Caribbean Corporation which brought almost 2,000 passengers to Bourgas, most of them well-off and with an interest in cultural tourism. Five ships with a total of 5,670 passengers visited Port Bourgas within a fortnight of the commissioning of the new passenger terminal. Usually, sea tourists set foot on the Bulgarian



shore to take a walk along the Southern coastline and see emblematic landmarks. The passenger lists of the liners visiting Port Bourgas last year featured people from all over the world, including from remote destinations such as Australia, New Zealand and Japan. The season closed in the autumn when the American Pacific Princess sailed from Nessebar. Cruise ships will continue to visit Port Bourgas next spring. Many more companies have been showing an interest in including the Bourgas Bay aquatoria in their schedules. Tour operators are

hoping that cruise tourists who have already been to Bulgaria's coast and have enjoyed their stay, will share their experience with friends and relatives thus provoking their interest. To this moment 43 chips have been included in the schedule for the coming season. September and October are expected to be the busiest months. The American Express publishers has released a guide of potential Black sea cruise destinations, commissioned by the giant Royal Caribbean Cruises, where Bourgas features as a possible stopover.

ECONOMY 2014: shall we sow or reap...

by Tanya Harizanova

Just as 2013 ends in 3, so the Bulgarian economy during the outgoing year has been “times three”. We had three governments, three national budgets, we will be building three major energy projects. Not to mention the three protest waves - against the energy monopolies, against the oligarchy and for a new kind of morals in politics. The crisis in the country is also “times three” – to the financial and economic crisis last year we added a political crisis.

The year kicked off with the “energy” of the people who flooded streets and town squares in protest against the energy monopolies and said a firm NO to the construction of the Belene nuclear power plant. Yet it ended with a YES to the second nuclear power plant project. Meanwhile the start was given to South Stream and we approved the construction of a 7th reactor for the Kozloduy nuclear power plant. We witnessed three government programmes, three different visions of the Bulgarian economy and three budgets – each more optimistic than the last. This optimism, however, did the government an ill turn – Standard & Poor’s warned that it may bring down Bulgaria’s credit rating because of the political risk, and to fulfill its ambitious plans, the government had to take out a loan thus lending this optimism financial dimensions.

What are we to expect in 2014?

Are we going to plant new seeds or are we going to reap the fruit of the previous year? Growth or recession; emancipation or dependence on mere circumstance: what will Bulgarian economy see over 2014? What are the “reefs” and the positive trends? Shall we give the Bulgarian economy a plus or a minus this year?

Over the years of transition the country’s economy has proved to be quite crisis- and tremor-proof. Indicative of this are the macroeconomic indicators which could even serve as an example to countries in a state of recession. Although it is said that “economists have predicted nine out of the last five crises,” we can’t do without their forecasts, just as we can’t do without weathermen... That

is why we turned to economist Ruslan Stefanov from the Centre for the Study of Democracy to ask him: Shall we sow or reap this year?

“We sow and we reap every year,” Ruslan Stefanov says. “We shall reap what we have sown last year – things like debts, decisions on EU programmes, projects we have in the works, etc. At the same time we are sowing for the coming months. For instance – the decisions taken at the close of 2013, such as the reduction in the price of electricity and the transfer of budget revenue reductions to 2015. We took out additional loans, something that the coming generations will “reap”. But the most important thing we shall transfer from 2013 is the massive void when it comes to a sound, clear and long-term commitment

by the Bulgarian government to boosting the competitiveness of the country’s economy. As far as the crisis is concerned – we should take a look at the EU. While we still have a Europe in pieces, with lots of fear and uncertainty about what will happen next, with growth rates of 0.5 percent, I don’t think we can expect anything very different from last year.”

Growth or recession?

“I’d say growth within the frameworks of last year’s growth. Maybe a bit higher, but this to a great extent depends on the development of the European economy. And we are not expecting to see any dramatic growth there, at least not over the first six months of 2014. There will be an economic growth, but what people will feel will be more like the clouds scattering and a bit of sun peeping in. Well, at least there will be no recession, that’s for sure.”

“Reefs” or positive trends?

“I’d say positive trends, especially for the export oriented businesses. The opening of the EU market for Bulgarians is a trend, no less positive. Let us not forget that Bulgaria has now entered the EU as a truly full member. However, a big “but” remains – the inability of politicians to cope with corruption, the shadow economy, organized crime and the judiciary. That is where the “reefs” are to be found.”

Shall we give the Bulgarian economy a plus or a minus?

“Well, at the beginning of any year, I would always say: “a plus”. We all start out with a positive mind set. This is not just the result of trends, but because we are witnessing a certain amount of recovery in Europe and across the globe. We hope that there will be a greater certainty in Europe, which will transfuse here as well. So, it is definitely a plus sign.”

On January 25, the **Bulgarian National Radio** celebrates its 79th birthday

The national public radio operator BNR is a media leader among all radio stations in Bulgaria.

January 25th is the Day of the Bulgarian National Radio.

On the same date in 1935, Tsar Boris III signed a decree, stipulating that broadcasting in this country would become state property.

Today the Bulgarian National Radio /BNR/ is not only the largest media but also the leading cultural institution in the country, broadcasting its own programs and news via 10 radio stations: the national channels "Horizont" and "Hristo Botev", as well as local radio stations in Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas, Stara Zagora, Shumen,



Vidin and Blagoevgrad. Radio Bulgaria of the BNR offers unique webcasts online in 11 languages.

The BNR has a leading position as a modern media on the web. An increasingly important place in its

website is allocated to the audio and visual content. In 2012, the BNR launched its latest multimedia platform - Radio Binar, offering audio-visual production on a varied selection of topics and genres.

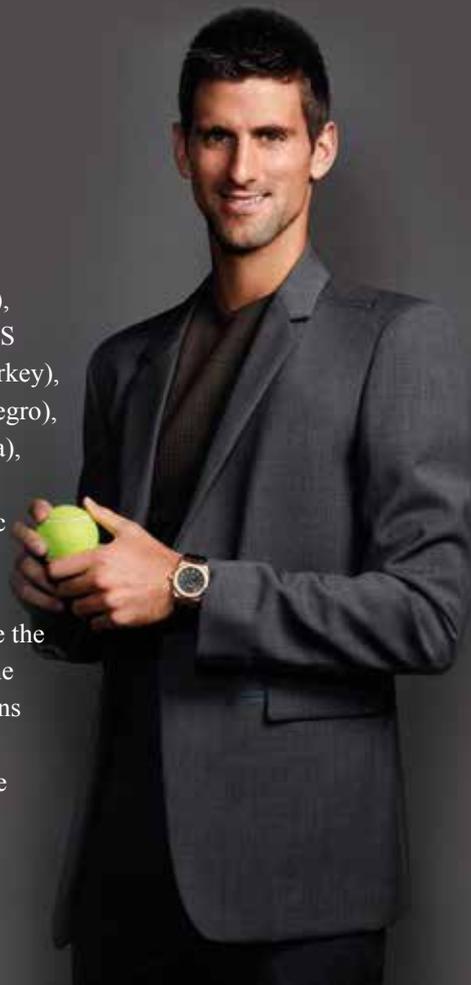
The BNR is the largest Bulgarian producer of music, radio drama and children's programs. It preserves and develops the richest sound archive in the country, the Golden Fund, and engages in

large-scale concert and recording activity with its six musical groups: Symphony Orchestra conducted by maestro Emil Tabakov, Mixed Choir, Big Band, Folk Music Orchestra, Children's Choir and the Radio Children vocal group.

BALKAN ATHLETE OF THE YEAR 2013

Serbian tennis player, Novak Djoković grabbed for the third consecutive time the award for best sportsman in the Balkans in the 41st edition of a traditional poll organized by the Bulgarian News Agency (BTA). Sandra Perkovic (Croatia) became second, and **Bulgarian Ivo Angelov** ranked 3rd. He became wrestler № 1 in the world in the 60-kg weight class in 2013, according to the rankings of the International Wrestling Federation (FILA). During the past season Angelov won the World and European titles in the Greco-Roman style. National information agencies of the

region took part in the traditional poll. These were: BTA (Bulgaria), ANA-MPA (Greece), AGERPRES (Romania), Anadolu Agency (Turkey), Tanjug (Serbia), MINA (Montenegro), MIA (Macedonia) HINA (Croatia), Fena (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Albpress (Albania). Djokovic was included in the poll cards of all voters and he gathered a total of 89 points. This way he became the second person in the history of the survey with three consecutive wins after legendary Bulgarian athlete Stefka Kostadinova, who won the award in the period 1995-1997.



Bulgaria's Danubian horizons

by Tatyana Obretenova



In 2011, the Council of the EU adopted the Danube Strategy aiming at the economic progress of the region. The Action Plan is based on four pillars: connectivity of the region, environmental protection, prosperity and cooperation against organized crime. 150 projects under the Strategy have already started.

Bulgaria has received a positive assessment from the European Commission for the first two years of implementation of the strategy. During that time the construction of the second bridge over the Danube at Vidin-Calafat was completed, a project for a gas link between Bulgaria and Serbia was launched and an agreement for the exchange of data on flood prevention between Bulgaria and Romania was also signed. Seven years after its accession to the EU, however, Bulgaria

remains the poorest country in the bloc. Northwestern Bulgaria is the poorest region in the country. Therefore the Danube Strategy remains important over the next EU programming period (2014-2020), which began on January 1, 2014.

What are the Danubian horizons for Bulgaria until 2020? Here is what Bulgarian MEP of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats Ivaylo Kalfin told Radio Bulgaria.

“The Danube Strategy has no designated financing. The EU has two macro-regional strategies: the Baltic and the Danube one. They are something of an experiment to see if such measures can help these regions. For this purpose funds under various programs of national co-financing can be used. To work under the Danube Strategy the participation of at least three countries is required. The

concept of the Danube basin is understood quite widely, including a large number of countries - members and non-members. They must agree on joint projects related to the development of the Danube. However, I think the scope should be limited. For example, the latest line of the subway to the airport in Sofia is currently under construction with money supposed to be invested in consolidating the Danube banks. Formally, this is not a violation in the sense that the whole country enters the Danube region. However, this does not help the Danube much, nor the opportunities that we can use. I think we need to introduce more restrictions so that funds go into the nearby Danube regions and support the potential of the river. The richest regions in Germany and Austria are near the Danube while in Bulgaria and Romania the poorest are close to the river. However, there is an enormous economic potential that can be used. “

Can you see this strategy in the light of the EU 2020?

“Yes, but again at least three countries along the Danube need to gather together and begin to fund joint projects. There are several projects that have a high degree of readiness. One is connected with the improvement of navigation on the Danube. One of the problems of the river are large fluctuations in the water level. In the winter it is not navigable because of ice drift, while in the summer the water level is low. This can be partly corrected. There are projects related to strengthening the riverbanks erosion, which are also important. I’m sure we can think of other initiatives directly connected with the Danube in the sphere of cultural tourism, ecology and business.

There is, for example, a large EU project to build a cycling lane along the length of the entire river. Part of it is already a fact between the towns of Kozloduy and Nikopol.”

Refugee wave and Bulgarians' compassion

by Maria Diana Hristakieva



Haralan Alexandrov

The number of refugees in Bulgaria already exceeds the country's capacity. Since the beginning of 2013 over 11,000 people have crossed illegally the Turkish - Bulgarian border. The refugee wave has triggered different reactions in society. While some feel compassion and are ready to help, others express sometimes radical feelings against the Syrian refugees. Bulgarians usually view themselves as tolerant people.

But is that true?

“We are about to learn something new about ourselves and I am not sure if we would like it. This is the fact that Bulgarians are tolerant only from time to time,” social anthropologist Haralan Alexandrov says. “But where did our tolerance go? To my mind, tolerance towards people coming from outside is very low. In order to understand the attitude towards refugees, we should first understand





what is happening inside the country as a whole. If conditions here were good, people would be more compassionate to the suffering of others. But many people in Bulgaria are focused on their own survival and do not want to know about the suffering of others. There is nothing that can alleviate the fears of these people. Another theory is that the changes that took place in Bulgarian society in the past decades, connected with the fall of the communist regime, have created an outlook much different from the traditional Bulgarian tolerance. Personal values like altruism, support, compassion are at a very low level in our society.”

Bulgaria has welcomed refugees during other periods of its history.

How did society react then?

“Society used to react in a much more adequate way. Currently, the state lacks capacity and organization but the important thing is the reaction of society. The real question is why our society is so hostile towards refugees. In the past, society reacted much more swiftly and adequately and whole regions were provided for a great number of refugees coming to Bulgaria. Of course, these were mostly Christians with a similar culture, which is not the case nowadays. There is an organization called ‘Friends of Refugees.’ These are people who do impressive things in order to help refugees. They even welcome refugees into their own homes. This shows that traditions have not been completely lost.

Xenophobia usually decreases with the passing of the first wave of refugees. By the way, there are thousands of Arabs who have been living in Sofia for years and they are not regarded as a threat. They have actually integrated very well in our society and it accepts them.”

Let us not forget that during the Second World War, Bulgaria managed to rescue its Jewish people from deportation to the Nazi death camps, demonstrating that Bulgarians care for people in need, for their neighbors, and friends.

Bulgaria to receive 10.5 million euro to address refugee crisis

In 2014, Bulgaria will receive over 10.5 million euro of emergency aid to address the refugee crisis. The news was announced by Deputy Interior Minister Vassil Marinov in an interview for Pressa Daily. This includes 8.6 million euro of emergency aid under European programs and 3.5 million dollars from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Marinov added. He stated Bulgaria had already has received nearly 1 million euro in aid from the Czech Republic .



Human of the Year award goes to refugees and their Bulgarian friends

by Diana Hristakieva



The award ceremony – Krassimir Kanev – far right

For the 6th consecutive year, the human rights organization Bulgarian Helsinki Committee gave out its annual Human of the Year awards. The awards are given to promote bold and tenacious people and organizations in their efforts to advance human rights. For the first time so far, the big Human of the Year award is “two in one”. Two statuettes with a crystal flower – the symbol of light, truth and justice went to two groups which are integrally bound – these are the refugees in Bulgaria and the informal organization “Friends of Refugees”.

“I nominate refugees seeking asylum in this country for their courage, strength and intrepidity to leave their homeland, jeopardizing their lives and risking inhumane and derogatory treatment but guided by the big idea of living dignified lives”, said Krassimir Kanev, chairperson

of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee. “I nominate them for their refusal to reconcile themselves to injustice and to be trampled upon and obliterated, for their determination not to be victims but humans. I nominate them for their courage. Their relentless will expresses the whole fight for human rights. And as to the informal organization “Friends of Refugees”, we nominate them for their timely and fearless efforts to support these people. They change attitudes and eradicate prejudices. These people work in unprecedented conditions in modern Bulgaria, amid escalating hatred to people who are different, as they vehemently defend the very foundations of human life and its dignity. What they have done was of vital importance and the least we could say is that they took care of real people in real time amid ineffective state institutions and a hostile social environment.”



TROYAN – a Mecca for plum brandy aficionados

by Veneta Nikolova

When one says Troyan, one means Troyan plum brandy! This firewater with its specific aroma called in Bulgarian “rakiya” is a cult phenomenon for the small town in the heart of the Balkan Range. It entails legends, songs have been devoted to it, along with

jokes and even a whole festival. Almost everyone here produces homemade brandy in special caldrons in the yard, and never stops bragging about their fragrant production.

To go to Troyan and not to taste the plum brandy is like going to Rome and not seeing the Pope, locals laugh. They welcome each guest with a small glass of the drink, one can taste its different versions at restaurants and taverns across the whole town. The appetizers that go with it – salads of fresh vegetables, homemade sheep and goat cheese, bacon, covered with aromatic herbs, cured sausages... these goodies tickle the palate, making the tasting of Troyan’s plum brandy an unforgettable experience. The production process follows centuries-old traditions that make it an art of a kind. The amber-coloured drink has its own display in the yard of the local art crafts museum. ▶





► There we learn that back in 1871 Hungarian traveler Felix Kaniz mentioned in his chronicles the skills of the Troyan people, who perfected their homemade brandy with local plum varieties with a high sugar content and pits that could easily be separated from the fruit. Supposedly, the Troyan Monastery monks were the first to start brewing brandy as early as the 16th century, while the recipe was kept secret and passed from one abbot to the next. However, we do know that the monastery drink contained about 40 herbs.

The museum building

The museum exposition features their detailed description. We also learn that in 1882 the Troyan plum brandy gained its first world recognition – a diploma and a bronze medal at the exhibition



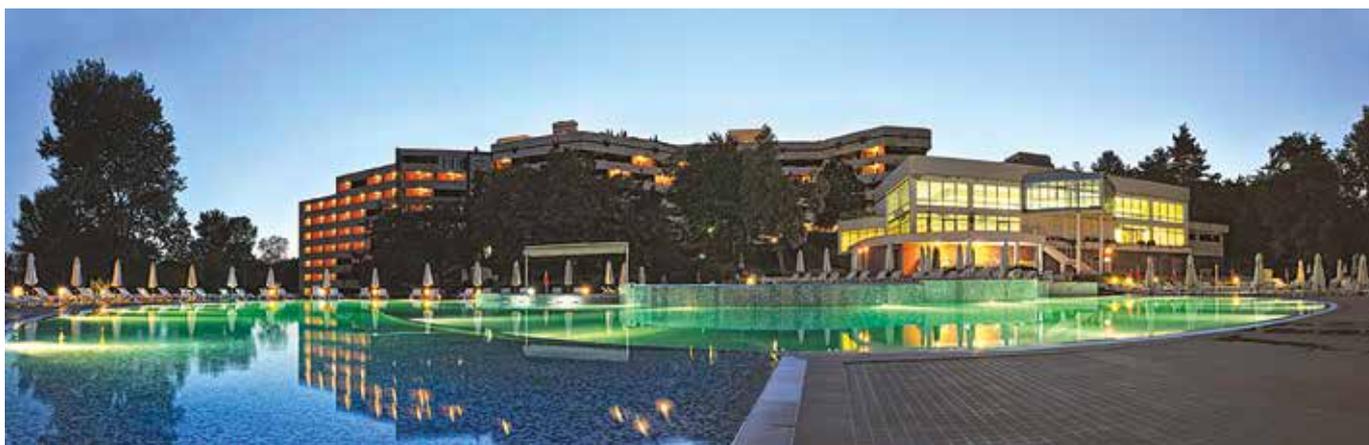
in the Belgian town of Antwerp. The virtues of this alcoholic elixir have been appreciated by emblematic people, such as Pope John Paul II and former US President Bill Clinton. No brandy connoisseur can resist the magic of the amber-coloured beverage. This explains a rather curious anecdote from the past, told by Mrs. Eleonora Avdjieva, the museum's director: "Back in 1928, a referendum twas

held in the Troyan village of Lometz, demanding the closure of pubs. Of course, the production of such large quantities of brandy meant lots of consumption. The referendum resulted in 115 votes for the shutting down and only 7 against. However, the results didn't stand long, because an unexpected side effect occurred. The sworn fans started to tour the neighboring villages and sometimes did

not return for days. Serious scandals broke out and it became clear that traditions couldn't be wiped out by party campaigns.”

The distilling device as a museum exhibit

Thousands of tourists from this country and abroad visit Troyan each autumn, to attend the festival of plum brandy. The program of this alcohol fiesta features folklore events, tasting of Troyan delicacies, joking tours and, of course, drinking contests. Once you've tasted it, you will want more... What is the secret of the good Troyan brandy? The size of the vessel, where the fermentation takes place is a key condition, local experts reveal. The bigger the vessel, the better the quality of the plum brandy. However, what makes brandy tasting so enjoyable is the good humour and the good friends in the heart of the Troyan portion of the Balkan Range.



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Bulgarian ski sports during Olympic season

by Vessela Vladkova

Ski season 2013/2014 has been officially opened in Bulgaria – first in Pamporovo and later in Bansko and Borovets. The start of the season was given with a festive event for winter sports fans. The season has started for competitors, too. Everyone is looking forward to the culmination in February at the Sochi Winter Olympics where the Bulgarian delegation will consist of 16 athletes.

The only gold medal for Bulgaria from Winter Olympic Games so far belongs to biathlete Ekaterina Dafovska from Nagano 1998. Bulgaria has not managed to create good conditions for the development of competitors in winter sports. For several years now Ms. Dafovska has been chair of the Bulgarian Biathlon Federation. She says that against the backdrop of a vascillating state policy in the sphere of sports, no medals can be expected at the Olympics.





“In Bulgaria the political situation is unstable and this affects sports, too. We are always waiting for some special talent to appear”, Ekaterina Dafovska explains. “I was lucky because at that time the Bulgarian women’s biathlon team was very strong and I learned a lot and was able to make progress. Too bad that after us there is no one to continue the traditions.”

In February, the oldest winter resort in Bulgaria – Borovets will host two starts of the European Alpine Skiing Cup. The competitions will take place on the run named after skier Petar Popangelov. The 55-year-old alpine skier is the only Bulgarian with a victory in the World Cup. “There are many problems in Bulgaria, not only in the sphere of sports,” the skier says. “Things are not working as they do in advanced countries. In the past, the state provided enough financing for sports but now things are different.” ▶

► Five-time World Cup overall champion Marc Girardelli who is a consultant at the Bulgarian Ski Federation agrees.

“Things in alpine skiing do not look good. We should have more patience when we work with young competitors as it takes years to make a champion. On the other hand, more professionalism is required both from skiers and the federation. Otherwise Bulgaria cannot hope for international success.”

Girardelli remained true to the tradition and this year opened once again the season in Bansko. For a 10th consecutive year legendary skiers gathered under Todorka Peak. Girardelli was joined by Popangelov, Alberto Tomba, Luk Alphand and Jure Kosir. All of them wished success to the Bulgarian skiers.



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Skiing in Bulgaria

Bulgaria offers excellent opportunities for dynamic winter tourism. The tall mountains Rila, Pirin, Rhodopes, Vitosha and the Balkan Range offer all conditions for skiing and other winter sports, with excellent ski runs and a snow cover up to 180 days a year in the high-mountain resorts. The total length of the ski runs is more than 80,000 m, with a displacement of up to 1,500 m, and a good infrastructure.

The biggest winter resorts in Bulgaria – Borovets, Pamporovo, Bansko offer ski runs of varying degrees of difficulty, runs for slalom and giant slalom, for cross-country skiing, ski-jumps, suitable places for heli-skiing, snowboarding, training areas; ski tows, gondola and chair lifts, as well as accommodation all the year round. Tourists have at their disposal highly trained ski instructors from the Association of Bulgarian ski schools,

who organize and conduct individual or group skiing, snowboarding, cross-country courses. The Association is a member of the international skiing association INTERSKI. Alongside the traditional alpine skiing, cross-country skiing and snowboarding, the aim now is to offer a full range of tourist winter sports services such as heli-skiing, trekking, off-run coasting, snowshoe hiking, motor toboggan tours, para-skiing etc.

IT'S CARNIVAL TIME...

...but instead of Rio, let's go to Pernik, writes Georgi Hristov, convinced that Balkan rhythms won't leave you indifferent

I've had dreams about going to the Rio de Janeiro carnival, but have never been. I have also dreamt of joining the crowds in Venice or the Island of Corfu, I was recently most fascinated with what I read about Cote d'Azur street celebrations and the festivals in Goa, India – shall I continue with the list of places I haven't visited?

It's very often the case with us Bulgarians – we think our dreams will never come true - then suddenly we realise they are so close by, that we risk not noticing them. My dream to experience a carnival came

true, in a very Bulgarian, yet utterly unique way. Until recently I had only heard of the Pernik mummers' festival. Earlier this year, though, I felt determined not to miss it, yet again. My surprise was astounding; I didn't know what exactly to expect, but believe me, reality was much better than any of my dreams.

The surprise

The dull, post-communist mining town of Pernik, just 15 miles west of Sofia, looked unrecognisable. It was a nice Sunday morning in late January. People had started filling up the main square

long before we arrived. Some still looked a bit sleepy, but obviously excited about what was about to happen. Most importantly, the mummers (editor's note: Bulgarian mummers paint their faces, wear colourful traditional costumes with lots of noisy bells, and do their walking and dancing on high stilts) were all there. The mummers, or cuckers in Bulgarian, seemed to have succeeded in defying the cold and miserable weather of the days before – it was a sunny morning, with clear blue skies and a strong positive feeling of spring. ▶



► **It takes a whole year to prepare the costumes**

The international Pernik mummers' festival is an impressive celebration of authentic masked folk customs and games. It's an integral part of the Bulgarian folk traditions, focussed on the unique bachelors' ritual in particular. From time immemorial, the members of the mummers' band gathered in the village square on the morning of New Year's Eve (13-14 January according to the old calendar). Their costumes had been lovingly prepared in the 12 months prior to the festivities, and were made of fur, leather and corn leaves, with lots of bells of various sizes hanging on the mummer's waist,

back and chest. The masks were made of bird feathers, lambswool, cone- and cylinder-shaped goat-fur rugs, interwoven with pompoms of colourful threads and animal teeth. Costumes varied from region to region, but the nature of the ritual was the same everywhere.

The bandleader

The bandleader, called bolyubashia was, and still is, dressed in an old-time full military uniform, and wears a colourful feather-decorated fur hat on his head. All the mummers meet up in the morning and start the village round from house to house, where the hosts greet them with wine and nibbles. To the sounds of an ancient rhythmic trance and the many bells, the band performs a ritual dance. The mummers' heavy slow

movements and loud shouts are meant to wipe out all evil spirits in the village and bring good health and a good crop to all.

Traditionally, a 'bride' is kept hidden in one of the houses. Men play all parts in the ritual, the 'bride', too, is a young lad; the 'groom' has the task to win 'her' over and take her away. Later on, the 'priest', another leading character, performs the marriage ceremony in the village square. Folklorists interpret this wedding as a symbol of male-female unity for prosperity and good fortune.

With the evil spirits chased away, the villagers continue the celebrations, singing and dancing till late in the evening. Children, even toddlers, are also encouraged to take part, for the sake of the tradition's continuity.

The evil is going away

According to the bandleaders, only a highly imaginative man can make a good mummer – he has to be very creative and resourceful with the costume design; even more so when performing the ritual dance- he has to actually 'see' the dark forces leave the village and help the others





see them too. Like a shaman, the true mummer goes into a mind-switching trance, with a dance that's both mystical and mesmerising. For centuries this unique custom has been kept unchanged in some Bulgarian villages. But, in the Pernik region, almost all villages have their own mummers' games on 13 January, with Pernik playing host to the 'Surva' annual mummary festival for the last 40 years. Its popularity is growing, and each year more groups take part.

A carnival with over 5,000 participants

In 1995, the town of Pernik became a member of the European Carnival Cities' Federation. Traditionally 5,000 people in over 90 groups from all over the country take part in the January festival, as well as many guests from Asia, Africa and other European countries. ▶



► The many foreign and Bulgarian visitors come to experience the magic of the games, to see and touch the beautiful costumes and masks, and to exchange best wishes.

The march of the bizarre creatures

About noon the festive atmosphere reaches its peak – by then the weather is incredibly mild, almost spring-like, the sun is shining, and large cheerful



crowds are heading for the mummers' parade in the central pedestrian area of Pernik. It is a unique procession of ever more bizarre creatures, a celebration of the mummers' imaginative spirit and endless enthusiasm. On an improvised stage, each village in turn performs and a special panel and the audience judge its dances.

I look around and see nothing but broadly smiling, happy faces. It seems these really scary people, the mummers, parading in their bizarre outfits, have managed to erase all our unpleasant thoughts and make us feel relaxed and completely at ease. No frowning or tense faces, no unkind remarks, not a care in the world. Mundane problems have given way to the beauty of the celebration.

The sound of the bells

Cheerful old men walk amongst the viewers inviting them to kiss a wine pot, beautifully decorated with coloured ribbons and holly branches. At first, I don't know what to do with this pot. Then I look at the old men's smiling and youthful faces - a picture of wisdom and healthy living, and the penny drops! I quickly grab the magic pot, give it a big kiss, followed by a very big sip. The young wine is delicious!



The sound of the mummers' bells is everywhere, helping us relax, unwind and...stop thinking. Before we know it, we are also dancing to the great Balkan rhythms; performers and viewers merge into one joyful crowd. Everything is allowed today. No one seems to mind the weird painted faces, the witches and the drag artists, the monsters, the 'paupers' and the bright lipstick on male faces. It's show time! Tomorrow seems a long way away.

Behind the masks

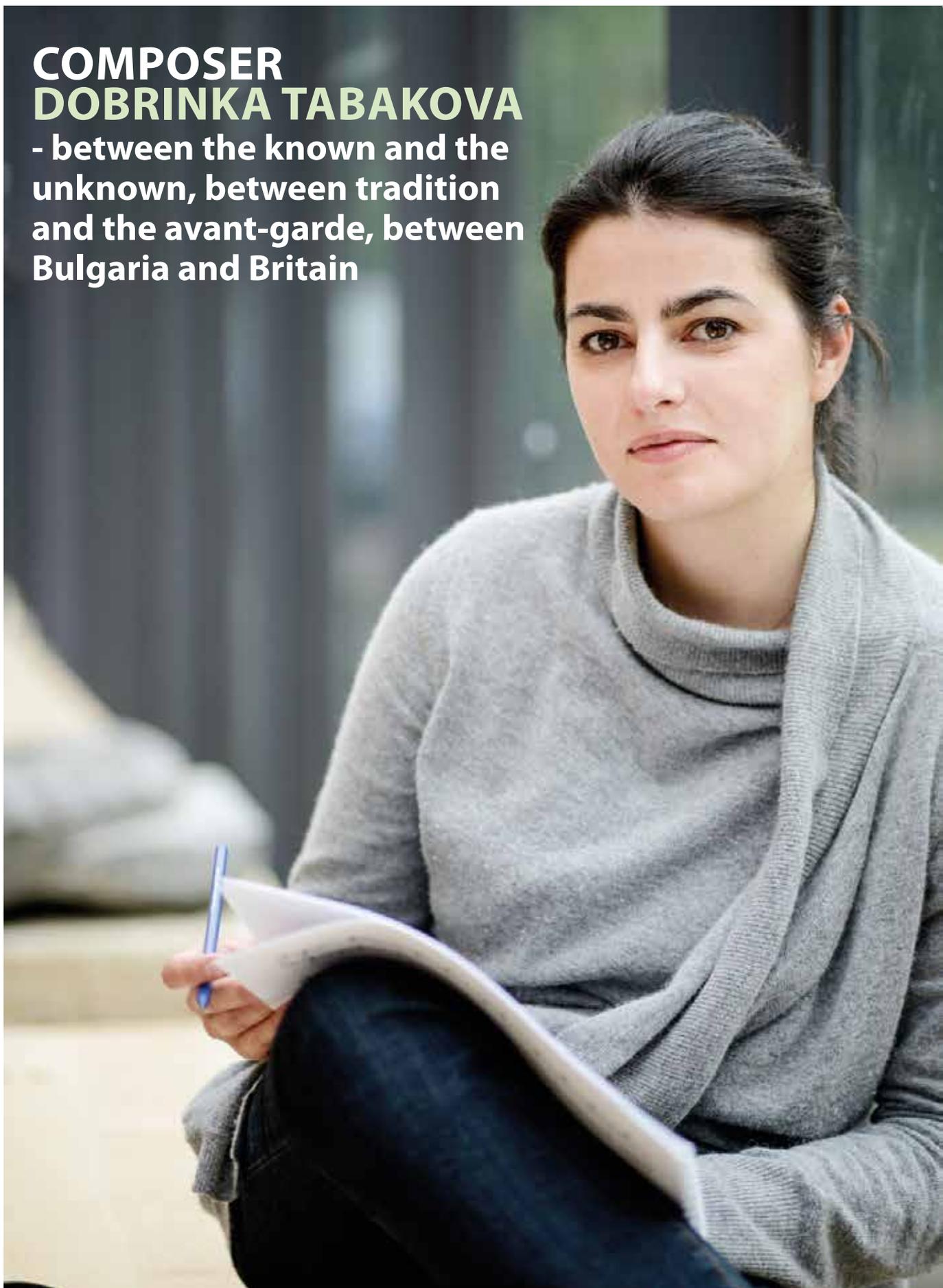
The carnival holds up to ridicule everybody and everything. Hidden behind the anonymity of the masks and knowing no one would recognize them, people can, for once, be whoever or whatever they like and let the festive rhythm do the rest. Yes, I was there too, and had a great time. My only regret is I have to wait too long for the next one. I thoroughly enjoyed the liberating spirit of the whole experience. It made me think I would rather dress up and try to push

the evil spirits away once a year, than put on the mask of the successful, the condescending or the insincere - any role modern people could think of for themselves, every day. Wouldn't you?



COMPOSER DOBRINKA TABAKOVA

- between the known and the unknown, between tradition and the avant-garde, between Bulgaria and Britain



Dobrinka Tabakova was born in 1980 in Plovdiv. Only 14-year-old, she won the Jean-Frederic Perrenoud Prize at the 4th International Festival of Music in Vienna. She studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London and the Guildhall School of Music, where she won the Witold Lutoslawski award (1999). She has a PhD in composition from King's College London (2007). Her works have been performed in Bulgaria, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, France, Germany, Austria, USA, China, Australia, etc. Tabakova's compositions are included in the repertoire of prominent artists such as violist Maxim Rysanov, violinist Janine Jansen, cellist Christine Blaumane and others. She has received a number of prestigious contracts, the last one from the Royal Philharmonic Society for the Music Biennial in the UK in 2014.

The first author's CD *String Paths* of composer Dobrinka Tabakova has been nominated for the prestigious Grammy Nomination 2014 for Best Classical Compendium. The award ceremony will be held on January 26 this year in Los Angeles.

The official presentation of the album took place in a studio in central London on 22 April 2013. It is released by the renowned British label for modern jazz and classical music ECM. Tabakova is the first Bulgarian composer ever to feature in its catalog. "For me this was an exciting and long-awaited event", Dobrinka Tabakova says. "The launch was attended by journalists, colleagues

and friends. There was also a concert program. It started with my work *Suite in Old Style* which I wrote for violist Maxim Rysanov". This same work was one of the "culprits" that made producer Manfred Eicher discover the Bulgarian composer.

"In 2008 when we played *Suite in Old Style* at the Lokenhaus festival in Austria, producer Manfred Eicher liked it and wanted to hear more of my works," Dobrinka Tabakova recalls. "I sent him some recordings and later I received a message where he was offering me to do a whole CD with my works. We made the recordings especially for this album, the majority in Vilnius with the Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra in their hall of their Philharmonic. Only one of the works was recorded in Berlin – the string sextet *Such Different Paths*. I very much hope that the audience will like this CD. For me it is the culmination of many years of work and friendships with the people who perform on this album." The album includes *Concerto for Cello and Strings*, *Suite in Old Style* inspired by Rameau (*Suite in Old Style* for Viola and Chamber Orchestra) and three chamber works: the string trio *Insight*, the string septet *Such Different Paths* and a trio for violin, accordion and double bass called *Frozen River Flows*.

At the time when she received her Grammy nomination, Dobrinka Tabakova was in Sofia to record her new work titled *Fantasy Homage to Schubert*. It is now in the sound archives of the Bulgarian National

Radio, performed by the string section of the BNR symphony orchestra conducted by Emil Tabakov.

In recent months, the Bulgarian composer was also engaged in working on the soundtrack for a new film called "Pulse" which will premiere at the Glasgow Short Film Festival (13-16 February). The film will be screened at the opening of the forum and will then travel around other cities in the UK, and in August will be screened again in Glasgow in the cultural program of the sports games. The director of the film is from Scotland. "I am working with her for the first time and the script revolves around life in a large cosmopolitan city and how it affects people", Dobrinka Tabakva explains. "It tackles the theme of alienation between people that can lead to serious inner conflicts and negative thoughts. The film is oriented towards different nations living together, so I wanted to include instruments uncharacteristic of the Western world. The piece is written for two pianos and percussion. I also included the gamelan - an ensemble of musical instruments typical of the region of Indonesia. I also incorporated into the music the idea of the Morse code. We live so close to each other physically, but spiritually we are so alienated that we need to send signals to each other".

NB. The article uses two interviews made by Milen Panayotov for the Hristo Botev national channel in 2013.

PIRONKOVA wins her maiden WTA title



Best Bulgarian female tennis player Tsvetana Pironkova won her first WTA title in her professional tennis career. The Bulgarian athlete scored eight consecutive victories on her road to the trophy in

Sydney. She defeated 6:4; 6:4 the No 9 seeded Angelique Kerber from Germany at the final. Earlier, Pironkova won against world's No 6 Petra Kvitova (the Czech Republic) as well as against Italian

tennis player Sara Errani who currently places 7th in the world rankings. Due to her success at the Sidney tournament, Pironkova jumped by 50 positions in the world rankings and currently places 57th.

On February 15-16, Borovets will host Men's 2014 Alpine Ski European Cup

Elite skiers will gather for a last warm up before the Olympics in Sochi. Alongside with the preparations for this international event, the activities aimed at implementing the massive investment program for EUR 40 million are underway in Borovets. The new season offers a pleasant surprise for the fans of winter sports. There are less queues and easier access to the lifts thanks to

the new system with contactless payment cards. The lift passes can be recharged via the Internet. Their prices remain unchanged – the price of a day card for adults is BGN 55.00, and the one for children – BGN 33.00. Night skiing for adults costs BGN 22.00. The same as last season are also the prices for all ski and snowboard equipment rental packages and for training lessons with ski teachers. New snow cannons will ensure better conditions for skiing in the areas of "Sitnyakovo" (Central Borovets), "Yastrebetz" and in the final

sections of the "Yastrebetz 1" ski track.

During this winter season there are some improvements in Borosport Snow Park, the most modern attraction in Borovets. The park, which has become a favorite place for snowboarders and freestylers, is at the top of the "Popangelov" ski track this season. There are three sections with various degree of difficulty – for beginners, intermediate and freestyle expert level. According to the preliminary estimates, Borovets expects about a 5 to 7% growth in the number of tourists this season.

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FEBRUARY 2014

Events Calendar

Asenovgrad – 1 February

Wine festival with wrestling contest, open to the public. February 1 is the day when local people start the spring pruning of the vines and visit the St. Trifon chapel. The festival also features amateur wrestling matches, to the accompaniment of drums.

Sofia - 7 February

Concert by Emir Kusturica and the No Smoking Orchestra, National Palace of Culture.

Melnik – 8-9 February

Golden Grape Melnik Wine Festival featuring a diverse folklore programme and lots of wine tasting at the wineries in the region.

Blagoevgrad – 10 February

Jars of fiery honey on St. Haralambos day at the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin church in Blagoevgrad. When consecrated, honey is thought to possess curative and magical powers.

Trifon Zarezan – 14 February

Vine growers' day. Trifon Zarezan is connected with vineyards and the making of rakia and wine. The day is celebrated throughout the country, notably in Veliki Preslav with a Wine Festival, in Hissarya with wine tasting, in Brestovitsa where vines are pruned and wine is tasted, in Souhindol, Soungourlare and other towns and villages.

Sofia – 14 February

Concert of Plácido Domingo, venue Arena Armeec

Borovets – 15-16 February

European alpine ski cup 2014, men giant slalom and slalom.

Apriltsi – 19 February

Festival of bacon and mulled rakia. Traditional cooking exhibition – contest and festive programme.

Pavel Banya – 24 February, 2014

Mummer Festival in Pavel Banya. Takes place during the first week of Lent; locals call it the Carnival, the mummers are dubbed “Old men”.

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The Sound Recording Studio of BNR First Studio



Area of 420 square meters
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Sound engineers' control room
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Volume of 90 cubic meters
Sound recording equipment

Audio mixing consoles:

- SSL DUALITY 48 channels
- DAW:
24 channels AD/DA Alfa Link MADI SX
24 channels AD/DA Alfa Link MADI AX
- SOUNDSCAPE 55 32
- SOUNDSCAPE Mix/Editor SW
- PC&HP XW 4600
- 2 monitors HP LP 2065

Audio monitors:

- GENELEC 1035
- GENELEC 1031

Other equipment:

- Analogue: STUDER A812
- Recorder SONY PCM 800-24
- DAT SONY 2800

Guitar amplifiers:

- DYNACORD TURBO
- DYNACORD B412
- FENDER SHOWMAN REVERB

Audio processing equipment:

- LEXICON 480 with LARC
 - LEXICON PCM 80
- #### **Microphones:**
- NEUMANN USM69
 - BRUEL & KJAER
 - U87; U89; U49Fet
 - KMS84, KM84, TLM170,
 - GFM132 AKG D224E, D12
 - D140, C1000S, C747

Additional equipment:

- sound system

Musical instruments:

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- HAMMOND ORGAN
- YAMAHA ELECTRON – E3
- Vibraphone PREMIER, marimba
- Xylophone and bells MUSSER
- Timpani and big drum
- Drum set LUDWIG
- Glockenspiel, celesta
- Harpsichord and harps



Geographic Location:

The Republic of Bulgaria is situated in the north-eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula. It covers a territory of 110, 993 square kilometers. The Republic of Bulgaria neighbours Romania to the north, Greece to the south, Turkey to the south-east, Serbia to the west and Macedonia to the south-west. The Black Sea is Bulgaria's natural eastern boundary as its coastline is 378 km long.



Time Zone: Time is in the East European Time Zone. Eastern European Standard Time (EET) is 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT+2).

Territorial and administrative division: Bulgaria is a parliamentary republic. The country is divided into 28 regions and 258 municipalities. Six plan regions were defined in the country as well in conformity with the requirements of the EU.

Language: The official language is Bulgarian, and the official alphabet is Cyrillic. The Bulgarian language belongs to the group of the Slavonic languages. Russian and Serbo-Croatian are the most similar languages to it. English is the most common foreign language. Almost all young people in the cities speak English. French, German and Russian are also spoken.



Climate: The predominant climate in Bulgaria is moderate and transitional continental. (2,000 to 2,400 hours of sunlight per year). Four seasons. Dry and hot summers. Average temperature (April - September): + 23 °C. Cold winter with snowfalls, average temperature: 0 °C.

Basic measurement units: For weight: gram – kilogram – tonne; 1 tonne = 1,000 kg; 1 kg= 1,000 gr. For length: centimetre – metre – kilometre; 1 km = 1,000 m; 1 m = 100 cm. Distance in Bulgaria is measured in kilometres. Speed is measured in km/h.



Electric Power: 220 V, 50 Hz

Convertible currency:

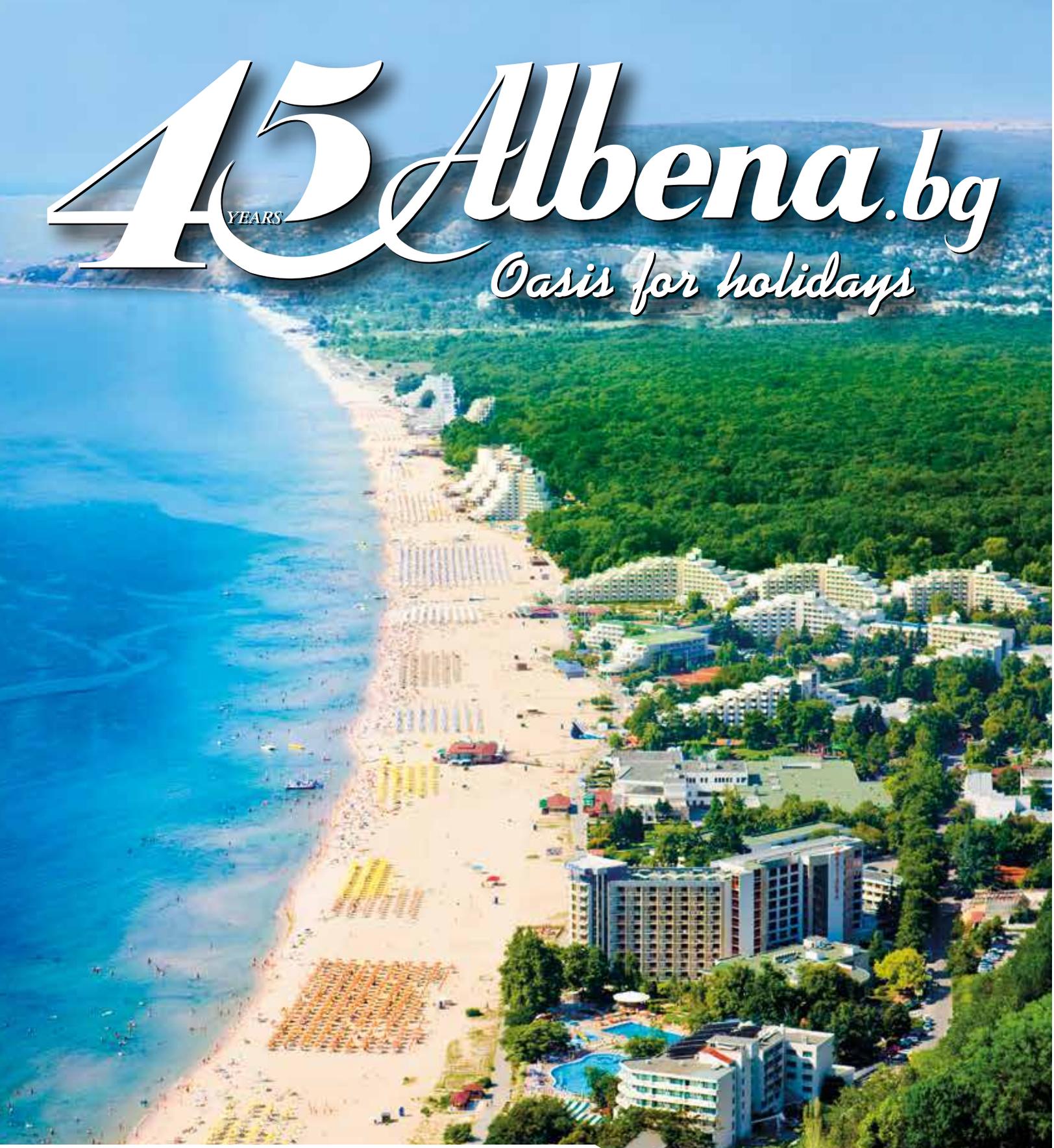
The Bulgarian monetary unit is the Bulgarian Lev (BGN). 1 Lev = 100 stotinki. Presently coins in circulation are of nominal values 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50 stotinki, and 1 lev. The banknotes are: 2, 5, 10, 20, 50, and 100 leva.



Visa: Foreign citizens need a valid international passport and a visa to enter the country. Visas are issued by the Bulgarian consular sections at the Bulgarian embassies abroad. Bulgaria has signed visa-free agreements with a number of countries, mainly from Central and Western Europe. EU citizens may enter the country only with a valid ID card.



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You can find them in 11 languages, offering information in text, sound and image. Radio Bulgaria's creative potential and technical level allows us to launch a multimedia product building the up-to-date image of this country. Through this product the team of the media would gladly respond, as it has always done, to each sign of interest in Bulgaria, to your desire to learn more about this country's history, culture, traditions and folklore; the Bulgarians' everyday life and their contribution to world processes. Our programme defends, through the articles we offer, the public mission and prestige of the Bulgarian National Radio among its ever-growing listening and reading audience the world over.



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