DeHavilland EU



Bulgaria

Presidency Briefing

January - June 2018

Welcome



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On 1 January 2018, Bulgaria will take over the Presidency of the Council of the EU from Estonia.

Over the next six months, the Balkan nation will chair the meetings of the Council, mediate between the Council and Parliament, and help steer the direction of EU policy.

This briefing gives a preview of what to expect from Bulgaria during the New Year- its priorities, the major players, and the current European context the country must navigate.

Keep reading to understand the Presidency's institutional role, to get a view from Brussels through exclusive interviews with MEPs, and to identify the key decision-makers during the next six months. Look out for a follow up briefing in the New Year, featuring in-depth policy analysis and further details on the Bulgarian Presidency's meetings and events.

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The Presidency

Understand what it means and Bulgaria’s priorities

What is a Presidency?

Member States take it in turn to hold the Presidency of the Council of the EU, passing on the baton every six months but acting within Trios of countries. This is the first EU Presidency held by Bulgaria which joined the Union in 2007. The Council is **co-legislator** with the European Parliament, but has exclusive competence over sensitive areas, such as tax policy. The Council meets in ten configurations, divided by policy area, which the national ministers of the Presidency chair. For instance, the Environment Council meetings are attended by national Environment Ministers and chaired by the Environment Minister of the rotating Presidency, in this case, of Bulgaria.



Commission VP Jyrki Katainen & Estonian Minister for Rural Affairs Tarmo Tamm.
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The Presidency mediates between the Member States, and is responsible for drawing up compromise texts. When agreement is reached, the Presidency will represent the Council at 'trilogue' meetings with the Parliament and Commission. The informal agreements, which often represent the breakthrough on a legislative proposal, depend on the negotiating skills of the Presidency, and are often used to measure a country's success in the role.

Council Strategic Agenda

1. Jobs, growth & competitiveness
2. Empowering & protecting all citizens
3. Energy union & future-oriented climate policy
4. Freedom, security, & justice

The Presidency is crucial for EU policy making, but the administrative burden is significant, especially for smaller Member States. The advantages for the country holding the Presidency are therefore not obvious, particularly as it must be politically neutral. The Presidency acts as an honest broker, and the country cannot be seen as pushing its own agenda too hard. Therefore, the Trio of countries have an **18 month programme** to follow with overarching aims that must be completed by the time the final country has finished holding the Presidency.

Bulgaria takes over from Estonia, meaning it is the second country of the current Estonia-Bulgaria-Austria trio to lead the Council and its work. As the Bulgarian Presidency website states, the three countries have agreed "upon a positive programme focusing on security, strengthening the external borders of the EU, economic growth and competitiveness". However, these aims are not exhaustive and, given that the received wisdom in European politics is seemingly to expect the unexpected, new developments and challenges may need to be addressed as they appear - not least those relating to the ongoing Brexit negotiations.

What are the priorities?

The official motto of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU - "united we stand strong" - offers an immediate insight into what will, in large part, guide the direction of the Presidency. Like that which preceded it, the Bulgarian Presidency will again seek to maintain unity between Member States and realise a "a stronger, more secure and more solidary European Union".

In more specific terms, the four main priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency are: the future of Europe and young people – economic growth and social cohesion; European perspective and connectivity of the Western Balkans; security and stability in a strong and united Europe; digital economy and skills of the future.

The future of Europe and young people

Despite economies throughout the EU recovering of late, the Bulgarian Presidency has declared that other long-standing structural challenges, like those of high debt levels and weak pay growth, can best be tackled through Member States working together. To this end, and as part of its push for greater social cohesion, Bulgaria will lead on the Multiannual Financial Framework beyond 2020, the Cohesion Policy beyond 2020, the future of the Common Agricultural Policy, and deepening the Economic and Monetary Union.

European perspective and connectivity of the Western Balkans

Even a quick glance at press releases related to the Bulgarian Presidency will reveal how much attention has been given to the Western Balkans. This should come as little surprise given Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov is on record as saying he sees the Presidency as an opportunity to push for EU membership for six Western Balkan states. Whilst reforms aimed at supporting EU accession should be expected, in the more immediate future, the Presidency will seek to improve connectivity between the Western Balkans and the EU to allow for greater regional cooperation.

Security and stability in a strong and united Europe

In terms of security and migration policies, the Bulgarian Presidency will seek to realise consensus amongst Member States in addressing existing vulnerabilities. Its stated efforts will be in strengthening the EU's external borders, better managing migration processes, laying the foundations of a Defence Union, aiding information exchange, and working towards "efficient, fast and fair justice".

Digital economy and skills of the future

One of the priorities of the Estonian Presidency was creating a "digital Europe" and, much in the same vein, the Bulgarian Presidency will seek to complete the Digital Single Market and aid the development of digital-related skills. In an effort to ensure the European economy remains competitive, attention will be given to encouraging entrepreneurship and social innovation, and to addressing the link between education and the needs of the future labour market.

The View from Brussels

Place Bulgaria's priorities in the wider European context

The MEPs

DeHavilland spoke to MEPs from across Bulgaria's political spectrum to gather their thoughts on their country's priorities. Read extracts below, or skip to the end of this briefing for full interviews.



Eva Maydell, EPP
Sits on **IMCO**, **ECON**
National party **in government**



Peter Kouroumbashev, S&D
Sits on **ITRE**, **TRAN**
National party **in opposition**



Ilhan Kyuchyuk, ALDE
Sits on **AFET**, **CULT**
National party **in opposition**



Svetoslav Malinov, EPP
Sits on **CULT**, **ITRE**
National party **in opposition**

DeHavilland: **What do you think the priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency should be?**

> **Ms Maydell**: Advancing the digital economy and skills development is essential. Digitalisation has already had an impact on our society, economy, political life, etc. We need to prepare our citizens for this new digital world and equip them with the skills they need to go forward.

> **Mr Kouroumbashev**: The Bulgarian Presidency closely follows Jean-Claude Juncker's priorities from his State of the Union speech. There is a so-called specific Western Balkans flavor, as more attention for the region was announced as the 'biggest' priority of the Bulgarian Presidency. But this flavor also comes from the Commission's cuisine.

> **Mr Kyuchyuk**: We should push for the EU's cohesion policy. Bulgaria needs cohesion policy in the next programme period … we should insist the cohesion policy to be not only continued but also to have the required financial resources.

> **Mr Malinov**: I believe the Energy Union - with an emphasis on the infrastructure of our region - should be one of our priorities. For our region … Energy Union is crucial, especially bearing in mind current dependence on Russian resources.

DeHavilland: **What challenges will Bulgaria face?**

Ms Maydell: 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 - Bulgaria is ready to demonstrate professionalism and move the European agenda forward.

Mr Kouroumbashev: Brexit will be the biggest challenge. If things go wrong, ... Bulgaria, and later Romania, will carry a heavy responsibility in the subsequent wheeling and dealing aimed at avoiding major damage for the EU, and also for the UK . It is not by chance that Theresa May has private meetings with Bulgarian PM Boyko Borissov in the wings of the EU summits.

Mr Kyuchyuk: Unfortunately, the most significant challenge during the Bulgarian presidency will be the re-introduction of populist/nationalist forces in the governance of Europe. At this moment this seems totally irreversible because populists/ nationalists continue to be part of the current Bulgarian government

Mr Malinov: Our presidency will be under the shadow of Brexit, and journalists and analysts will overlook our efforts on anything else, as Brexit is huge, and it will probably dwarf everything.

DeHavilland: **With your own political interests & activities in mind, where do you want progress?**

Ms Maydell: If you ask people from Brussels, they mostly associate me as a digital MEP having worked on Portability, Digital Content Contracts, European Cloud, ePrivacy Regulation … I would like to see the Free Flow of Data Regulation adopted under the Bulgarian Presidency.

Mr Kouroumbashev: Bulgaria is a pro-European country, but at the same time, as a new member, it is still shy, it has an “us-and-them” attitude vis-à-vis Brussels. The biggest progress would be if my country would start feeling comfortable at the driver seat.

Mr Kyuchyuk: I would like to see progress be made during the Bulgarian presidency in terms of inclusion of young people in politics and EU enlargement in the Western Balkans ... I believe that young people have ambition and desire to reform the EU, to create new political realities in Europe.

Mr Malinov: I'm a huge fan of the Erasmus program. After the celebration of 30 years of the program, I want to continue some of the activities to make it more popular, give it more financing, and to make it more creative. It's not just about the mobility of children - it can go further.

The Politics

In what European political climate does Bulgaria take up the Presidency? New-found confidence in Brussels may favour the country's - and its neighbour's - wider ambitions.

Jean-Claude Juncker in September called for Member States to seize a window of opportunity for reform. “The wind is back in Europe’s sails”, said the European Commission President during his 2017 State of the Union address.

Bulgaria will be overseeing what Mr Juncker has in mind for the EU for the first half of 2018. What’s more, confidence in Brussels may give a boost to the country’s wider ambitions: accession for its Balkan neighbours, and entry for itself into the Eurozone and Schengen Area.

On one's doorstep

Prime Minister Boyko Borissov has been clear he sees the Presidency as an opportunity to push for EU membership for six Western Balkan states: Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYRM), Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo.

Their progress until now has been mixed. Current frontrunners are Serbia and Montenegro, whose accession talks are open, and, according to Mr Juncker, can expect to join the EU by 2025. Albania and the FYRM have achieved candidate status at least, but the latter has been unable to make headway due to Greek opposition to its name. Bosnia and Herzegovina applied for membership in 2016, but its economic and political problems have proved toxic to Brussels, and it currently lacks the designation of candidate status. Kosovo is not even recognised by five Member States (Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Slovakia and Romania). In any case, Mr Juncker has effectively ruled out further accession before 2019.



PM Boyko Borissov and EC President Jean-Claude Juncker in November.
© European Union, 2017 / Source: EC - Audiovisual Service

Bulgaria’s accession efforts during its Presidency will come to a head at the EU-Western Balkans Summit on 17 and 18 May 2018. The first to be held in Sofia, the Summit will bring together diplomats from across the EU and offers the chance to put Western Balkan accession back on the European agenda. For Mr Borissov, a successful summit would mean a clear roadmap from EU leaders on how his neighbours can join the club.

Ready or not

Contained in the Presidency’s ‘Useful Information’ material for journalists is a rule of thumb for converting Bulgarian Lev to Euro: 2 to 1. Such advice may soon become redundant - Brussels says Bulgaria is “ready” for the Eurozone.

Bulgaria's chances of membership ultimately lie in the country’s fiscal disposition, which is presently seen as healthy by

policymakers. A balanced budget and sustainable debt burden reassures the currency bloc's more defensive members, who fear a weak link who may precipitate another crisis in the monetary union.

Moreover, the Bulgarian Presidency coincides with a pivotal moment for the Eurozone: a March deadline set by France and Germany for an agreement on how to reform the bloc. Stronger monitoring and crisis-fighting tools further mitigates any risks presented by Bulgarian entry.



UK Brexit Secretary David Davis and the EU's chief negotiator Michel Barnier address reporters.
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Momentum is also gathering towards Bulgaria's other European objective, that is, entry into the Schengen Area. "If we want to protect our external borders and rightly so strengthen them even more, then we need to open the Schengen area of free movement to Bulgaria and Romania immediately", Mr Juncker also told MEPs during his 2017 State of the Union speech.

Brexit phase two

By a curious twist of fate, Bulgaria will help oversee the exit of a Member State widely-seen as instrumental for its own entry: the UK. British Prime Minister Tony Blair pushed heavily for Bulgaria's EU membership for its support of NATO during the Yugoslav wars. Now, Bulgaria must work to ensure an orderly British departure.

Bulgaria's position on Brexit is, in short, hard. It has fallen in step with other Member States in providing a united front against British desire to cherry pick the bloc's rules. Mr Borissov has even gone so far as to say Brexit presents a "rare chance for the Balkan Peninsula to replace the UK" - though he has also expressed hope the country rethinks its decision.

Phase two of talks - on the transition period and future trade, now that divorce issues are settled - is pencilled in for midway through the Presidency, February or March. A key challenge for Bulgaria, as intermediator-in-chief for the Council, will be helping to maintain the EU27's unity in the talks ahead. One only has to look at ongoing negotiations with Mercosur or the eleventh hour doubt casted by Belgium over the 2016 Canada deal to see how trade can expose Member State divisions.

Key Documents

- 'The Future of Europe' White Paper [link]
- State of the Union 2017 [link]
- 2018 Commission Work Programme [link]
- European Council assessment of Brexit talks [link]
- Western Balkans Summit 2017 [link]
- Eurozone Reflection Paper [link]

The People

Meet the ministers who will chair the Council meetings

Boyko Borissov

Prime Minister



Boyko Borissov is Bulgaria's 50th Prime Minister. A political survivor, Mr Borissov has seen two of his cabinets collapse. He has governed Bulgaria from the centre-right over three terms since 2009, relying on a "man of the people" appeal and, in his third government, a nationalist coalition partner. He has high ambitions for the European role of Bulgaria and its region.

Mr Borissov founded his party, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), in 2006 and remains leader to this day. The party's ideology blends liberal conservatism with pro-Europeanism, and its MEPs sit within the EPP Group in the European Parliament. GERB is the largest party in Bulgaria's National Assembly, occupying 95 out of 240 seats since March 2017. It is currently in coalition with the nationalist United Patriots electoral alliance, which holds 27 seats.

Since entering office, Mr Borissov's domestic agenda has first consisted in upgrading Bulgaria's infrastructure, including the expansion of the national motorway network. He has worked to streamline the state, initiating administrative reforms that have cut the number of agencies and merged ministries. He has also attempted to consolidate the country's finances - some may say with an eye to future membership of the Eurozone.

Allegations of corruption in the Bulgarian state and beyond, however, remain the key domestic challenge for Mr Borissov. In 2013, nationwide demonstrations against his first cabinet culminated in Mr Borissov's resignation, after high energy costs and perceived corruption in the industry brought protestors out on the street. Throughout the course of the protests Mr Borissov retained the support of the EPP in Brussels, receiving their endorsment ahead of the 2014 European Parliament elections.

Before becoming Prime Minister, Mr Borissov was Mayor of Sofia – Bulgaria's capital – from 2005 to 2009.

Mr Borissov's life outside of politics has been colourful to say the least. After leaving the police in 1990, he founded a security company, and worked as a bodyguard for King Simeon II of Bulgaria (who had renounced his title and become prime minister), as well as the country's retired former communist head of state. He has a passion for karate - not only refeering and coaching, but also competing. He is also currently the chairman of the Bulgarian Karate Federation. He made Bulgarian sporting history in 2013 when he became the oldest man to play professional football in the country, turning out for second division FC Vitosha Bistritsa. To this day he still occasionally plays striker.



PM Boyko Borissov on a visit to Sofia Tech Park.
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Tomislav Donchev

Deputy Prime Minister

General Affairs Council / Cohesion



Tomislav Donchev is Bulgaria's Deputy Prime Minister, also hails from GERB, and has served in all three of Prime Minister Boyko Borissov's cabinets. Expect Mr Donchev to bring a long-standing interest in EU Cohesion Policy to the General Affairs Council given he has served as Minister of EU Funds Absorption in the past. Even his advocacy of Western Balkan accession has a cohesion-based flavour, and, speaking in 2015 on Serbia's path to EU membership, he argued that "one cannot be rich and have poor neighbours".

Following the collapse of the first Borissov Government in 2013, Mr Donchev briefly served as an MEP, attached to the EPP Group. The formation of Mr Borrisov's second Cabinet in November 2014 – now as a coalition rather than minority government – saw Mr Donchev leave Brussels, return to Bulgaria's National Parliament, and regain responsibility for EU funds. However, he also became one of four Deputy Prime Ministers, a position he continues to hold with his cohesion portfolio in the third and current Borissov Cabinet.

Mr Donchev graduated from a mathematics high school in Gabrovo, and has two Masters' Degrees – one in philosophy, the other in economic management.

Krasimir Karakachanov

Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Defence

Foreign Affairs Council / Defence



Though first entering Bulgaria's National Assembly in 1997, Krasimir Karakachanov's current position as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence is his first in national government. He took up the post when the third Borissov Cabinet was formed in May 2017.

Mr Karakachanov leads the IMRO–Bulgarian National Movement, a party under the banner of United Patriots - a nationalist electoral alliance that is GERB's junior coalition partner. VRMO self-describes as a conservative and patriotic party.

His nationalist credentials coupled with his views on immigration, which he has linked to radicalisation, have led to ideological characterisations of his party as far-right in the press. In August 2017, Mr Krasimir told *Die Welt* that the EU must protect its external borders with arms to stop asylum seekers from entering Europe.

Mr Karakachanov ran in both the 2011 and 2016 presidential elections, securing 1% and 15% of the vote respectively.

Before politics, Mr Karakachanov was a published historian, holding a Master's Degree in the subject from Sofia University, St. Kilment. He gained a PhD in International Law and International Relations in 2014.

Ekaterina Zaharieva

Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Foreign Affairs

Foreign Affairs Council; General Affairs Council / Article 50



Ekaterina Zaharieva is a Deputy Prime Minister for Judicial Reform and Minister of Foreign Affairs, from GERB. Boyko Borissov is not Ms Zaharieva's first boss - from 2013 to 2015, she was Chief of Staff to the President of Bulgaria, Rosen Plevneliev. Ms Zaharieva also served as Mr Plevneliev's Minister for Regional Development during his caretaker government, which stepped in after Mr Borissov's first cabinet collapsed in 2013.

One of Ms Zaharieva's aims in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been to develop Bulgaria's ties with its biggest trading partner in the Balkan region: Ukraine. Bulgaria has continued to back EU and NATO efforts to secure peace in Eastern Ukraine through the Minsk Agreements. She oversaw celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 2015.

Ms Zaharieva studied law at the University of Plovdiv, going on to study a law master's degree. A lawyer until 2003, her legal career brought her close to politics, becoming a legal advisor and later Director of the Legal Directorate in the Ministry of Environment and Waters. She is fluent in German and English.

Vladislav Goranov

Minister of Finance

Economic & Financial Affairs Council



Vladislav Goranov was appointed Bulgarian Finance Minister in November 2014. His appointment came after a previous spell as Deputy Finance Minister and a brief excursion into the private sector, taking on a senior role at Sofia's Municipal Bank. A former civil servant, Mr Goranov has served in both the second and third Governments of Boyko Borissov, and representing Mr Borissov's GERB party. Before rising to the role of Finance Minister, he served as Deputy Finance Minister from August 2009 to April 2013.

Mr Goranov is known in Bulgaria for his strong support of pegging the Bulgarian Lev to the Euro, and is a supporter of Eurozone membership for his country. He has also notably called for increased transparency in deliberations over public spending.

Born in April 1977, Mr Goranov attended Pleven's High School of Mathematics before studying Economics at Tsenov Academy of Economics. He later earned a Masters in Accounting and Control.

Prior to entering elected politics, Mr Goranov was a civil servant, taking roles in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Agrarian Reform and the Ministry of Finance. During his later years at the Ministry of Finance, from 2001 to 2009, he served as Head of its Social Expenditures Division.

Valentin Radev

Minister of Interior

Justice & Home Affairs Council (Home Affairs)



Bulgarian Interior Minister Valentin Radev was appointed to his current position in May 2017 and, upon taking office pledged to reform and improve the Academy of the Ministry of the Interior. A member of Mr Borissov's GERB political party, Dr Radev previously served as Deputy Defence Minister from 2009 to 2013.

During his time in the Bulgarian National Assembly, he has served on the Foreign Policy, Defence and Internal Security and Public Order Committees. He has also served as the head of the Parliamentary Commission investigating allegations of interference in Bulgarian affairs by Russia and Turkey.

Dr Radev was born in Elin Pelin in February 1958. He attended the Shumen Artillery Academy, where he studied the chemistry of explosives, and later earned a Masters in Economics from the University of National and World Economy in Sofia. He earned a PhD in Ballistics and Aerodynamics from Sofia's Defence Research Institute in 1991.

Before entering politics, he pursued a career in military research. Accordingly, he is an expert in explosives and is the author of more than 130 scientific publications. He has invented 17 military products approved for use by the Bulgarian Army, and has served as Director of the Defence Advanced Research Institute and as Chair of the Bulgarian Association of Ammunition Specialists.

Tsetska Tsacheva

Minister of Justice

Justice & Home Affairs Council (Justice)



Former lawyer Tsetska Tsacheva Dangovska was appointed Justice Minister in May 2017 and has been active within the GERB party since 2007. Prior to the fall of Communism, she was a member of the Bulgarian Communist Party.

The first woman to serve as Chair of Bulgaria's National Assembly, she has also been viewed as a relatively uncontroversial figure within the GERB party and, in 2016, she was nominated by Boyko Borissov as his preferred candidate for President of Bulgaria. However, she went on to lose the contest to independent candidate Rumen Radev.

During the campaign, Ms Tsacheva emphasised the importance of Bulgaria's ties to the EU and NATO against a backdrop of increased tensions with Russia.

Born in May 1958 in Dragana, near Lovech, Ms Tsacheva attended Pleven High School of Mathematics and then went on to work in a local factory. She later earned a degree in Law from Sofia University.

She worked as a lawyer with the Pleven Bar Association during her earlier career, before later becoming Head Legal Advisor to Pleven Municipality. She served in that role until 2007, which was the year she joined Pleven Municipal Council and unsuccessfully contested the city's mayoralty on behalf of GERB.

Kiril Ananiev

Minister of Health

Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council (Health)



Former civil servant and economist Kiril Ananiev was appointed Health Minister in November 2017, after his predecessor resigned over a corruption scandal. He came to office promising to act immediately to address tensions in the sector by creating a consultative council for healthcare professionals, alongside which he has also prioritised inspections of hospital care.

Mr Ananiev served as Finance Minister from January to May 2017, and as Deputy Finance Minister from August 2014 to January 2017.

He began his career in 1980, working at the Ministry of Finance. He eventually rose to take the role of Head of the State Expenditure Directorate, before working as Head of the Financial and Administrative Service at Bulgaria's UN Permanent Representation in Geneva from 1996 to 1998.

He has also served as Deputy Finance Minister from 1998 to 2009, under three different administrations, and as Financial Policy Secretary to the President of Bulgaria and as Counsellor to the Political Office of the Prime Minister. Elsewhere, he has held positions within Bulgartabac and Bulgargaz, and has also been involved in the supervision of the Bulgarian Development Bank.

Mr Ananiev studied Finance and Credit at Karl Marx Higher Institute of Economics, now part of the University of National and World Economy. He also studied healthcare reform in the USA.

Biser Petkov

Minister of Labour & Social Policy

Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council

Economist Biser Petkov was appointed as the Bulgarian Minister of Labour and Social Policy in the third Borissov Government, formed in May 2017, nominated by the junior coalition partner, the United Patriots. Dr Petkov is an unaffiliated member of the legislature who previously served as a Governor of the National Social Security Institute.



Dr Petkov is a graduate of the University of National and World Economy, with a Masters in Economy and Organisation of Internal Trade and a PhD in Economics. He began his career as an academic, lecturing at his alma mater the University of National and World Economy.

In 2002, after more than a decade in academia, he became Chair of the State Agency for Social Security Supervision. Later, in March 2003, he became Deputy Chair of the Financial Supervision Commission. In September 2011, Dr Petkov was elected a Governor of the National Social Security Institute. He also served on the Bureau of the International Social Security Association from 2013-2016.

Ivaylo Moskovski

Minister of Transport, IT & Communications

Transport, Telecommunications & Energy Council (Transport & Telecommunications)



Ivaylo Moskovski is member of the GERB party and, in 2011-2013, served as Minister of Transport, Information Technologies and Communications in a previous government led by Boyko Borissov, after serving as Deputy Minister of Transport, Information Technologies and Communications between 2009-2011. He was also a member of the 42th National Assembly and a member of the Committee on Transport, Information Technology and Communications and the Committee on Energy.

Before becoming a politician, Mr Moskovski worked as trade director in industry. Besides that, he is member of the Managing Board and Deputy Chairman of the Association of the light industry manufacturers, and Chairman of the Competitiveness Committee at the Association of the light industry manufacturers.

He holds a degree in Public Finance from the Sofia-based University of National and World Economy and a degree in Financial Management from Svishtov-based Academy of Economics.

Temenuzhka Petkova

Minister of Energy

Transport, Telecommunications & Energy Council (Energy)



Temenuzhka Petkova, a member of the GERB party, is currently the Minister of Energy in the second Borissov Cabinet. She has extensive experience in audit, having been a Financial Inspector in Sofia's State Financial Control department and a State Internal Auditor and Head of Department in the Public Financial Inspection Agency. Between 2007-2010, she was Head of the Inspection Department at the Public Financial Inspection Agency (ADFI) and, following this, she was Head of ADFI between 2010-2013.

Aside from this, Ms Petkova held the position of Deputy Finance Minister in the interim Government that was in office until November 7 2014.

She is a graduate of the University of National and World Economy in Sofia and holds a Master's degree in Accounting and Control. She has also had training in Internal Audit in the Public Sector at the Ministries of Finance of Ireland and the UK Britain, and in State Financial Inspection at the Ministry of Finance of Portugal.

Neno Dimov

Minister of Environment & Water

Environment Council



Neno Dimov is Bulgaria's Minister of Environment and Water, of the United Patriots (OP) party. His libertarian background and his scepticism for global warming, which he calls "manipulation" and a "global business with fear" are expected to make his chairing of the Environment Council rather controversial.

He previously was an MP for the Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria (DSB) party from 2005-2009. He also served in Government as Chief Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Water and Deputy Minister of Environment and Water in Ivan Kostov's cabinet from 1997-2001.
He is known to be a supporter of EU integration and served as a member of Bulgaria's negotiating team. At EU-level, Mr Dimov served in the European Environment Agency (EEA), as a member of the management board (1997-2002) and as Director of the Programming and Information Directorate (2001-2002).

Rumen Porodzanov

Minister of Agriculture, Food and Forestry

Agriculture and Fisheries Council



An experienced officer of the Bulgarian Ministry of Finance, Rumen Porodzanov kicked off his political career in 1992, when he joined the Special Activities Funding division as an expert, until 1995. He went on to head the Finance, Trade and Services Division of the Ministry until 2001. From 2001 to 2009, he served as Director of the Real Sector Finance Directorate of the Ministry. In 2009, he took on the role of the Chief of Staff of the Ministry, until 2013 when he took the position of Executive Director of the State Agriculture Fund. He has also served as Caretaker Minister of Finance in the cabinet Georgi Bliznashki, in 2014.

Mr Porodzanov attended the University of National and World Economy where he obtained a Master's degree in Agrarian Business, Economics and Management.

Emil Karanikolov

Minister of Economy

Competitiveness Council; Foreign Affairs Council / Trade



Mr Karanikolov began his career in 2004 in the Sofia Municipality where he was jurist in "Legal and regulatory services". Between January 2010 and May 2010, he served as Director of "Administrative Control, Regional Development and State Property" in the Regional Administration of Sofia.

From 2010 to 2017, he was the Executive Director of the Agency for Privatisation and Post-Privatisation Control until his election as Minister of Economy on 4 May 2017.

In his position as Minister of Economy, Karanikolov argued heavily against the privatisation of the Bulgarian copper melter Kremikovtsi which was sold for one US dollar and called for a probe into the deal.

Emil Lyubenov Karanikolov has received a Master of Law from the University of National and World Economy.

Krasimir Valchev

Minister of Education & Science

Education, Youth, Culture & Sport Council



Former civil servant Krasimir Valchev was appointed Education and Science Minister in May 2017. An unaffiliated member of the government, Mr Valchev was nominated by Mr Brorissov's GERB party.

His former role as Secretary General of the Ministry of Education and Science from 2009 to 2017 means he is well informed about his brief. He was also involved in Bulgaria's programme of EU accession policy initiatives.

From 2002 to 2009, Mr Valchev served in the Ministry of Finance, where he focused on education funding. He briefly returned to the ministry in 2017 to serve as Head of Department in its Local Government Financing Directorate.

During his time in office so far, he has focused on addressing illiteracy and improving teachers' wages, as well as advertising the virtues of the teaching profession to address recruitment problems.

Boil Banov

Minister of Culture

Education, Youth, Culture & Sport Council (Culture)



Theatre director Boil Banov was appointed Culture Minister in May 2017 and previously served as Deputy Minister of Culture during the caretaker Bliznashki administration during mid to late 2014.

Upon being appointed, Mr Banov declared: "I promise to entirely involve myself in my new responsibility in order to contribute to the development of Bulgaria's culture and arts". He has discussed proposals for reform to the country's Patronage Act in order to create a regulatory basis for funding that goes beyond just state arts funding, somewhat like the UK's system of lottery grants.

He was born in May 1971, the son of famous Bulgarian actor Vasil Banov and his wife Lilyana Dimova.

Krasen Kralev

Minister of Youth and Sports

Education, Youth, Culture & Sport Council (Youth & Sport)



Krasen Kralev is member of the GERB party and is currently serving for the second time as Minister of Youth and Sports, having held the post in the second cabinet of Prime Minister Boyko Borissov from November 2014 to January 2017. He was Deputy Chairman of the New Time party until he resigned from the post in July 2009.

Co-founder of the Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections and founder and Chairman of the Board of Directors of MAG Communications, a group of marketing communication agencies, Mr Kralev owns two big internet media companies.

He is a graduate of the Medical University in Varna, after which he specialised in Political Campaign Management at the University of South Carolina, USA. Separately, Mr Kralev is a former national track and field athlete.

The Trio

Member States holding the Presidency work together closely in ‘Trios’, lasting 18 months with overarching aims set by the European Council.

Bulgaria is the second country in the 8th Presidency Trio, preceded by Estonia (June-December 2017) and followed by Austria (July-December 2018). The programme of the Estonia-Bulgaria-Austria was officially approved in the 20 June 2017 General Affairs Council and focuses on security, strengthening the external borders of the EU, economic growth and competitiveness.

On the following page, we reflect on how Bulgaria can build on Estonia's work.

Estonia: July-December 2017

Bulgaria: January-June 2018

Austria: July-December 2018

Romania: January-June 2019

Finland: July-December 2019

Croatia: January-June 2020

Germany: July-December 2020

Looking back

How did Estonia fare during its Presidency? How can Bulgaria build on Estonia's work? DeHavilland spoke with Urmas Paet, Estonian MEP, to find out.



Urmas Paet, ALDE
Sits on **BUDG**, **AFET, REGI, SEDE**
National party **in opposition**

DeHavilland: Which of the four stated priorities of the Estonian Presidency do you feel most progress has been made in?

Mr Paet: Estonia has successfully made progress in all of its priority themes, but just to name a few - from Estonia's Presidency perspective the Posted Workers Directive was an accomplishment where a balanced compromise was found. As the Rapporteur for the European Defence Union report I would also like to emphasise Estonia's progress in enhancing European defence cooperation, and Estonia's work in promoting a digital Europe.

DeHavilland: Given that Estonia is the first of the current Presidency Trio, where do you feel that the Bulgarian Presidency needs to concentrate its efforts?

Mr Paet: The Presidency lasts for six months, but in most cases, the process of achieving the final results takes more time than half a year. Because of this, consistency is an important keyword here: Estonia will pass the baton on and Bulgaria will continue work in many topics that Estonia has been working on such as work on the defence union and on digital Europe.

DeHavilland: Which of the legislative files discussed and adopted during the Estonian Presidency have been the most notable and significant?

Mr Paet: During the Estonian Presidency the Council achieved an agreement on the Directive on the Posting of Workers which was not an easy task. Progress has also been made in the reform of the Common Asylum System, Blue Card Directive and in the regulation that helps to cut greenhouse gas emissions and meet Paris commitments.

DeHavilland: What have been the most significant challenges during the Estonian Presidency so far?

Mr Paet: From a very humane perspective, I'd say that it is not easy to find compromises during marathon talks - it takes a lot of time and effort.

DeHavilland: To what extent have other issues, such as Brexit, affected the work and focus of the Council?

Mr Paet: Every Presidency has its own priorities. However, the presiding country always takes into account that there will be events and topics that happen unexpectedly and will require full commitment, such as Brexit, migration crisis etc.

Definitely, Brexit will affect the work and focus of the EU as a whole, not only during the Estonian Presidency but also in the long-run.

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For more insight into the **key policies** and **major players** of the Estonian Presidency, read our **previous briefing**.

Looking ahead

In the run up to the Bulgarian Presidency, DeHavilland interviewed the country's MEPs for insight into what the role will mean for the Balkan nation.



Eva Maydell, EPP
Sits on **IMCO**, **ECON**
National party **in government**

DeHavilland: What do you think the priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency should be?

Ms Maydell: I believe that the Bulgarian priorities are quite specific and on point. We need to revitalise the dialogue with the Western Balkans and the Bulgarian Presidency will aim to give solid EU perspective for these countries. We need a robust policy strategy to make sure we do not lose ground to other major players on the global stage. Second important goal we have set is to increase the legal and regulatory cohesion and to reduce inequalities across the continent, with the view of ensuring long-term stability. Thirdly, advancing the digital economy and skills development is essential. Digitalisation has already had impact on our society, economy, political life, etc. We need to prepare our citizens for this new digital world and equip them with the skills they need to go forward.

DeHavilland: What do you think the most significant challenges will be during the Bulgarian Presidency?

Ms Maydell: 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 - Bulgaria is ready to demonstrate professionalism and move the European agenda forward. Our vision of Europe is one of consensus, cohesion and competitiveness, while paying particular attention to the role and opinion of young people for the future of Europe.

A specific challenge is to keep the unity during the Brexit negotiations, which is also one of our main priorities. It is not by chance that "United we stay strong" is the slogan of our Presidency. Another challenging issue for Bulgaria as a President of the Council is the need for improving our asylum and migration policy, the Dublin System in particular, as well as the expected MFF (Multiannual Financial Framework) and the need to maintain the solidarity for all European regions and populations with tighter budgetary constraints.

DeHavilland: In terms of your own political interests and parliamentary activities, where would you like to see progress made during the Bulgarian Presidency?

Ms Maydell: If you ask people from Brussels, they mostly associate me as a digital MEP having worked on Portability, Digital Content Contracts, European Cloud, ePrivacy Regulation. However, if you ask people in Bulgaria they will probably describe me as advocate for entrepreneurship and new skills, given my work in my constituency on improving the education system. Having these two hats, speaking figuratively, I would like to see the Free Flow of Data Regulation adopted under the Bulgarian Presidency, as well as many new initiatives for the youth. Now is the time to bring in the fresh, bright spirit of the young, the truly European generation, born and raised in united Europe.

DeHavilland: To what extent do you think that other issues, such as Brexit, will affect the work and focus of the Bulgarian

Presidency?

Ms Maydell: 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. Our goal is to respond to the real needs of the people in Europe and turn challenges into opportunities. I hope that we will manage to honour the decision of referendum while solving the problems which this creates to 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.



Peter Kouroumbashev, S&D
Sits on **ITRE**, **TRAN**
National party **in opposition**

DeHavilland: What do you think the priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency should be?

Mr Kouroumbashev: Let's be serious. Successive Presidencies broadly follow the EU agenda. The Bulgarian Presidency closely follows Jean-Claude Juncker's priorities from his State of the Union speech. There is a so-called specific Western Balkans flavor, as more attention for the region was announced as the 'biggest' priority of the Bulgarian Presidency. But this flavor also comes from the Commission's cuisine. It's give-and-take: Juncker was extremely generous to Bulgaria and Romania in his speech, which is not by accident. The Bulgarian and Romanian Presidency will help him shape his legacy. What Juncker can do for Sofia and Bucharest in return is another issue. Here I'm more skeptical.

DeHavilland: What do you think the most significant challenges will be during the Bulgarian Presidency?

Mr Kouroumbashev: Brexit will be the biggest challenge. If things go wrong, Barnier and Juncker will be out of the negotiation process, and Bulgaria, and later Romania, will carry a heavy responsibility in the subsequent wheeling and dealing aimed at avoiding major damage for the EU, and also for the UK. It is not by chance that Theresa May has private meetings with Bulgarian PM Boyko Borissov in the wings of the EU summits.

DeHavilland: In terms of your own political interests and parliamentary activities, where would you like to see progress made during the Bulgarian Presidency?

Mr Kouroumbashev: Bulgaria is a pro-European country, but at the same time, as a new member, it is still shy, it has an "us-and-them" attitude vis-à-vis Brussels. The biggest progress would be if my country would start feeling comfortable at the driver's seat. And that it would shape the future EU, together with its partners, in full confidence of its prerogatives and competence, which should not be underestimated, if one looks at history and geography.

DeHavilland: To what extent do you think that other issues, such as Brexit, will affect the work and focus of the Bulgarian Presidency?

Mr Kouroumbashev: I already answered this question. There are other challenges, but they look smaller. David Cameron created the worst crisis. Bulgaria regrets the Brexit vote. Not because the net donor – net recipient relationship. It's because the UK is such an important European country, and an ally. The UK was a mover and shaker in the EU.



Ilhan Kyuchyuk, ALDE
Sits on **AFET**, **CULT**
National party **in opposition**

DeHavilland: What do you think the priorities of the Bulgarian presidency should be?

Mr Kyuchyuk: Bulgaria will assume the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU on the 1st of January 2018. For us, this is a unique opportunity to show to our European colleagues and partners that we are capable to set the political agenda of Europe. In reality, however, Bulgaria should focus on two priorities. I am glad that future EU integration of the Western Balkans is among them, The EU should not isolate itself and close its doors to future Member States. Western Balkan states are part of Europe and we will continue to call on the EU to demonstrate political support for the European perspective of the region. Moreover, Bulgaria should use the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU to promote its unique ethnic model, which has been the basis of our successful integration to both NATO and the EU. The second priority for which we should push for is the EU's cohesion policy. Bulgaria needs cohesion policy in the next programme period. Therefore, we should insist the cohesion policy to be not only continued but also to have the required financial resources.

DeHavilland: What do you think the most significant challenges will be during the Bulgarian presidency?

Mr Kyuchyuk: Unfortunately, the most significant challenge during the Bulgarian presidency will be the re-introduction of populist/nationalist forces in the governance of Europe. To this moment this seems totally irreversible because populists/nationalists continue to be part of the current Bulgarian government. In my opinion, Bulgarian authorities must find a way, as soon as possible, to take populists/nationalists out of the government because united and liberal Europe cannot be ruled by people who do not respect/protect the rights of minorities who are also EU citizens.

DeHavilland: In terms of your own political interests and parliamentary activities, where would you like to see progress made during the Bulgarian presidency?

Mr Kyuchyuk: Interesting question. I would like to see progress be made during the Bulgarian Presidency in terms of the inclusion of young people in politics and EU enlargement in the Western Balkans. The inclusion of young people in politics is a task to which I have been committed to for years. I believe that young people have ambition and desire to reform the EU, to create new political realities in Europe. Therefore, we should give them opportunities to participate fully in the process of taking decisions. When it comes to EU enlargement in the Western Balkans, I believe that this will assure peace, stability and democracy in Europe as a whole.

DeHavilland: To what extent do you think that other issues, such as Brexit, will affect the work and focus of the Bulgarian Presidency?

Mr Kyuchyuk: In fact, Brexit affects the work and focus of the Bulgarian Presidency from its beginning. Bulgaria's EU Presidency was brought forward six months because of Brexit. However, during Bulgaria's EU Presidency I personally want to see a deep and comprehensive partnership between the EU and UK in a long term perspective to reflect citizens' interests in the best way. This "new" partnership should be in the spheres of both trade and security, but British authorities must be aware that it

cannot be a selective one. The four freedoms of the EU are inseparable and go hand in hand, and any attempt to isolate one of them must be doomed to failure.



Svetoslav Malinov, EPP
Sits on **CULT**, **ITRE**
National party **in opposition**

DeHavilland: What do you think the priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency should be?

Mr Malinov: We are in a trio, the priorities of which have already been fixed, so we do not have a lot of room to manoeuvre. But our priorities should be connected to European policy with a regional focus - that's my understanding of what Presidency priorities are.

In that case, especially for Bulgaria, I believe the Energy Union - with an emphasis on the infrastructure of our region - should be one of our priorities. For our region - depending on how you define it (the Balkans, the Western Balkans etc.) - Energy Union is crucial, especially bearing in mind current dependence on Russian resources.

Another priority which is regional but also European should be an understanding of the problems of our region, with a push to enlargement, which at the moment is stagnating. That's why I believe that at the least a meeting of the leaders of the Western Balkans with EU leaders should be held in Sofia, and I see that is one of the priorities already. It's impossible to change the attitude towards enlargement, but it's at least possible to show some goodwill, readiness to cooperate, and for some advancement for certain countries.

These should be the priorities outside those already given officially.

DeHavilland: For the Bulgarian Presidency, what do you see as the most significant challenges during the next six months?

Mr Malinov: We're holding the Presidency for the first time, which presents challenges in of itself. But we have already been challenged as we were supposed to have our Presidency in the second half of 2018, because the UK was supposed to have theirs before us.

I believe the biggest problem for our Presidency, and biggest risk, is Brexit. Our Presidency will be under the shadow of Brexit, and journalists and analysts will overlook our efforts on anything else, as Brexit is such a huge thing, and it will probably dwarf everything.

DeHavilland: How do Bulgarians feel on the whole about Brexit? Are they being swept up in this pro-integration reaction we've seen to the vote?

Mr Malinov: We need to talk about two groups here: ordinary people, and elites who are aware of the history of Bulgaria's integration into Europe. For the latter, it is a huge disappointment. At the end of the 1990s, our breakthrough - the invitation for membership negotiations - was due to the Bulgarian government's strong reformist agenda. But it was also due to the general outlook of Great Britain.

Bulgarian politicians who were involved in the integration process will always remember the help, the crucial support for our integration from the UK. Also, in terms of geopolitical threats to the Balkans, and the need for deep understanding of Russian and Middle Eastern threats, we will miss having the UK in the EU.

Otherwise, Bulgaria is one of the most pro-European nations. We don't even discuss Bulgaria leaving the EU. We have extremely

weak Eurosceptic forces.
DeHavilland: In terms of your own parliamentary activities - I know you're a member of the Culture and Education Committee - where would you like to see the most progress on a more narrow front? Are there any big files coming up in the CULT committee you want to see progress on?

Mr Malinov: I'm a huge fan of the Erasmus programmme. After the celebration of 30 years of the programme, I want to continue some of the activities to make it more popular, give it more financing, and to make it more creative. It's not just about the mobility of children - it can go further.

I'm also a big fan of the new European Solidarity Corps. I hope it can get its own financing and that the Erasmus programme won't suffer, as the financing is not completely secure. In any case, these schemes should be more popularised.

DeHavilland: In terms of Bulgaria and the Euro and potential accession to the Schengen Area - what are your thoughts on that?

Mr Malinov: On joining the Eurozone, I think we are moving [towards it], although very slowly, but this is a process that it is very dependent on the political will of other countries and the European Commission.

This is not something we can do by ourselves.

This is in contrast with the Schengen problem, where, if we had done our reforms in the past, there would be no argument against us now, but we haven't done it. I'm extremely critical of Bulgarian governments in the last six years for failing to reform the judicial system or the prosecutor's office. Bulgaria hasn't done its own work in terms of the rule of law, and that's why we're not in Schengen

And this is why we are under supervision more broadly. People in Europe are suspicious of corruption, and what's why we don't get what we deserve. We should have done more in the last few years.

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