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Summary Article: **Bulgaria**  
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(bŭlgâr'ēə), Bulgarian *Balgarija*, officially Republic of Bulgaria, republic (2015 est. pop. 7,177,000), 42,823 sq mi (110,912 sq km), SE Europe, on the E Balkan Peninsula. It is bounded by the Black Sea on the east, by Romania on the north, by Serbia and Macedonia on the west, by Greece on the south, and by European Turkey on the southeast. Sofia is the capital. Other important cities are Varna and Burgas (the main Black Sea ports of Bulgaria), Plovdiv and Ruse.

## Land and People

Central Bulgaria is traversed from east to west by ranges of the Balkan Mts. (*Stara Planina*, or “Old Mountains” in Bulgarian); the ridge of the main range of the Balkan Mts. roughly divides the country into northern and southern regions. A fertile plateau runs north of the Balkans to the Danube River, which forms most of the northern border. In the southwest is the Rhodope range, which includes Bulgaria's highest point, Musala Mt. (9,592 ft/2,923 m). The Thracian plain lies south of the Balkans and east of the Rhodope. The Danube, the Iskŭr, the Maritsa, and the Struma are the principal rivers.

About 85% of the people are Bulgars. Turks make up almost 10% of the population, and about 5% are Romani (Gypsies). There are also smaller groups of Macedonians and Armenians; however, Bulgaria, with its historic claim to Macedonia, refuses to recognize Macedonians as distinct from Bulgars. Bulgarian is the predominant language. Most of the population belongs to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church; in 1953 the Bulgarian patriarchate, which had been disbanded in 1946, was reestablished. There is also a substantial Muslim minority.

## Economy

Until 1989, Bulgaria had a Soviet-style economy in which nearly all agricultural and industrial enterprises were state-controlled. A stagnant economy, shortages of food, energy, and consumer goods, an enormous foreign debt, and an obsolete and inefficient industrial complex instigated attempts at market-oriented reform in the 1990s. Since the 1990s S Bulgaria has in general become increasingly more economically developed and wealthier than the north. Long a largely agricultural country, Bulgaria's principal crops are vegetables, tobacco, wheat, barley, sunflower seeds, and sugar beets. Grapes and other fruit, as well as roses, are grown, and wine and brandy production is important. The country has been considerably industrialized since World War II. The leading industries are agricultural processing, petroleum refining, and the production of machinery and equipment, base metals, chemicals, coke, and nuclear fuel. Bulgaria's chief mineral resources include bauxite, copper, lead, zinc, coal, lignite, iron ore, and oil and natural gas. There are many mineral springs. Clothing, footwear, iron and steel, machinery, and fuel are exported. Imports include machinery and equipment, metals and ores, chemicals, plastics, fuels, minerals, and raw materials. Germany, Italy, Turkey, and Greece are Bulgaria's main trading partners.

## Government

Bulgaria is governed under the constitution of 1991. The president, who is the head of state, is popularly elected for a five-year term and is eligible for a second term. The premier, who is the head of government, is elected by the legislature, as is the cabinet. The 240 members of the unicameral

National Assembly are popularly elected for four-year terms. Administratively, Bulgaria is divided into 28 provinces.

## History

### *Early History*

The earliest evidence of human settlement, a prehistoric walled town near Provadia in E Bulgaria, dates to the 5th millennium B.C. Ancient Thrace and Moesia, which modern Bulgaria occupies, were settled (6th cent. A.D.) by Slavic tribes. In 679–80, Bulgar tribes from the banks of the Volga (see Bulgars, Eastern) crossed the Danube, subjugated the Slavs, and settled permanently in the territory of Bulgaria. The language and culture remained Slavic, and by the 9th cent. the Bulgars had fully merged with the Slavs. The first Bulgarian empire (681–1018), established by Khan Asparuh, or Isperikh (ruled 680–701), and his successor, Terrel (ruled 701–718), soon emerged as a significant Balkan power and a threat to Byzantium. In 809 Khan Krum (ruled 803–814) captured Sofia from the Byzantines, defeated (811) Emperor Nicephorus I, besieged Constantinople, and withdrew only after obtaining yearly tribute.

In the 9th cent. Bulgaria became the arena of political and cultural rivalry between Constantinople and Rome. In 865, Boris I adopted Christianity, and in 870 Constantinople recognized the independence of the Bulgarian church. Bulgaria received Byzantine culture through the Slavic literary language developed by St. Cyril and St. Methodius in Moravia and brought to the Balkans by their disciples. The first Bulgarian empire reached its height under Simeon I (893–927), who took the title of czar. After his death the country was rent by the heresy of the Bogomils.

Bulgaria crumbled under the attacks of a reinvigorated Byzantium in the 10th cent., and in 1018 it was annexed by Emperor Basil II. Byzantine domination was weakened by the invasions of the Pechenegs and Cumans and by internal disorders at Constantinople. The second Bulgarian empire (1186–1396) rose in 1186 when Ivan Asen (Ivan I) was crowned czar at Veliko Tŭrnovo. His son, Kaloyan, crowned in 1204 with the approval of the pope, defeated (1205) Emperor Baldwin I of Constantinople. The height of Bulgar power was reached under Ivan II (Ivan Asen), whose rule (1218–1241) extended over nearly the whole Balkan Peninsula except Greece. His successors could not maintain his empire.

### *Bulgaria under the Turks*

In 1330, Macedonian Bulgaria was conquered by Serbia. After the battles of Kosovo Field (1389) and Nikopol (1396) Bulgaria was absorbed into the Ottoman Empire. Turkish rule was often oppressive, and rebellions were frequent. By recognizing the authority of the Orthodox Eastern Church in Constantinople over all Christians in their empire, the Turks undermined the basis of Bulgarian culture. A determined effort was made to destroy Bulgarian Christianity and the Bulgarian language. The role of the Phanariots (see Phanar) was particularly resented.

Although the administration (1864–69) of Midhat Pasha made Bulgaria briefly a model province, by then Bulgarian nationalism was strong. The Mount Athos monastery had continued to use Bulgarian; there, in 1762, a monk had written a history, the first modern literary work in Bulgarian. Bulgarian schools were allowed to open in 1835. In 1870 the Bulgarian Church was reestablished. In 1876 a rebellion, led by Stefan Stambulov, broke out. The subsequent Turkish reprisals (famous as the “Bulgarian atrocities”) provided a reason for the Russians to liberate (1877–78) their neighbors (see Russo-Turkish Wars).

The Treaty of San Stefano created a large autonomous Bulgaria within the Ottoman Empire—a Bulgaria that Russia expected to dominate. In order to avert the expansion of Russian influence in the Balkans, a

European congress was called to revise the treaty (see Berlin, Congress of). By the new terms Bulgaria was reduced to the territory between the Danube and the Balkans. Present-day southern Bulgaria—then called Eastern Rumelia—became a separate autonomous province, and Macedonia remained under direct Turkish rule. Alexander (Alexander of Battenberg), first prince of Bulgaria, annexed Eastern Rumelia in 1885 and repulsed a consequent Serbian attack.

### *Independence and After*

Alexander's successor, Prince Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, profiting from the revolution of the Young Turks in the Ottoman Empire in 1908, proclaimed Bulgaria independent with himself as czar. Bulgaria was victorious against Turkey in the first (1911–12) of the Balkan Wars, but claims to Macedonia involved it in the Second Balkan War with its former allies Greece and Serbia, and it was soon defeated. By the Treaty of Bucharest (1913), Bulgaria lost S Dobruja and a large part of Macedonia.

The Macedonian issue was largely responsible for the entry in 1915 of Bulgaria into World War I on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary. There was much domestic opposition to the war, and when Bulgaria's military position crumbled, Ferdinand fled and Boris III succeeded (1918). In the peace (see Neuilly, Treaty of) Bulgaria was forced to pay reparations and lost its outlet to the Aegean Sea to Greece and some territory to the former Yugoslavia; S Dobruja was confirmed in Romanian possession.

The Agrarian party cabinet established (1919) by Stambuliski held power until overthrown (1923) in a bloody coup. An era of political confusion ensued, dominated by the violent activities of an irredentist Macedonian terrorist group. The world economic crisis of 1929 had a disastrous impact on impoverished Bulgaria as markets for agricultural exports shrunk. In 1934, Kimon Georgiev became premier with the help of the army and ended constitutional government, but he was ousted in 1935 by Boris III, who established his personal dictatorship.

In World War II, Bulgaria saw an alliance with Germany as an opportunity to satisfy its territorial claims. In 1940, Germany forced Romania to restore to Bulgaria S Dobruja. In 1941, Bulgaria occupied parts of Yugoslavia and Greece (including Macedonia), and declared war on Great Britain and the United States—but not the Soviet Union, because the populace was pro-Russian. The child Simeon II succeeded when Boris died mysteriously (1943). In 1944 the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria, and Soviet troops entered the country (Sept.). Pro-Allied political forces (Communists, Agrarians, and the pro-Soviet army officers), headed by Georgiev, seized power immediately. Bulgaria declared war on Germany, and an armistice with the USSR followed (Oct.).

### *Postwar Bulgaria*

After a short period of coalition rule, the Communists succeeded in taking over the government. The monarchy was abolished, and in 1946 Bulgaria was proclaimed a republic with Georgi Dimitrov as premier. The peace treaty with the Allies (1947) allowed Bulgaria to keep S Dobruja, but no gains were made in Macedonia. Dimitrov proceeded to eliminate possible opponents; Agrarian leader Nikola Petrov was executed in 1947. A new constitution was enacted, and Bulgaria became a one-party state. Industry was nationalized and farms collectivized.

Bulgaria closely followed the Soviet Union in its domestic and foreign policies; after the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform in 1948, Bulgaria sided with the USSR. Dimitrov's successor, Vulko Chervenkov, massively purged the Communist party (1950). In 1951–52, Bulgaria deported to Turkey some 160,000 citizens of Turkish origin. Relations with Greece and Turkey improved somewhat after

1954. Bulgaria joined (1949) the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and in 1955 became a member of the Warsaw Treaty Organization and the United Nations.

In the mid-1950s the government loosened its grip somewhat. Stalinists fell from power and purge victims were rehabilitated (posthumously in some cases). In 1965 army officers and party officials unsuccessfully attempted a coup. Bulgaria aided the USSR in the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. In 1971, Todor Zhivkov, who had been premier since 1962, became president. In the mid-1980s, a “Bulgarization” campaign was launched against the ethnic Turks. Turks were forced to adopt Bulgarian names, and Turkish-language broadcasts and publications were halted. In 1986, Zhivkov experimented with limited economic reforms such as a “self-management” program for industrial workers. In mid-1989, after ethnic Turkish rights groups mounted protests in May against the government, some 370,000 ethnic Turks left for Turkey in a forced exodus, though many later returned. Zhivkov's ouster in Nov., 1989, set off a year of social and political turmoil.

In Aug., 1990, the first non-Communist political leader in 40 years, Zhelyu Zhelev, was elected president. Economic reforms were introduced and a new constitution (1991) created a parliamentary democracy in the country. No party, however, was able to establish a long-term government, and major economic reforms proved difficult to enact. In 1994, the Socialist party (formerly the Communists) and its allies won a parliamentary majority at the polls, and Zhan Videnov, a Socialist, became premier early in 1995. A period of hyperinflation and economic stagnation followed, and charges of corruption were widespread.

Petar Stoyanov, of the Union of Democratic Forces, was elected president in 1996, and his party won parliamentary elections held in 1997; Ivan Kostov became premier. UN economic sanctions imposed during the 1990s on neighboring Yugoslavia (since dissolved into the nations of Serbia and Montenegro), a major trade partner, had serious negative effects on Bulgaria's economy. In the parliamentary elections of 2001, the National Movement for Simeon II (NMS), a party sponsored by the former king, captured 43% of the vote and half the seats, and Simeon became premier. In the presidential election later in the year, Socialist Georgy Parvanov won the post after a runoff, defeating the incumbent, Stoyanov. Bulgaria became a member of NATO in Mar., 2004, and a little more than a year later the country signed an accession treaty with the European Union (EU).

Parliamentary elections in June, 2005, resulted in a victory for the Socialists, but they did not win a majority and were initially unable to form a coalition, and subsequently NMS also failed to do so. In August, however, the Socialists, NMS, and the largely Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) agreed to form a coalition government. Socialist Sergei Stanishev became premier. President Parvanov was reelected in Oct., 2006.

On Jan. 1, 2007, Bulgaria became a member of the EU, but EU concerns over Bulgarian corruption led the EU in 2008 to suspend more than €500 million in aid to Bulgaria; roughly two fifths of that aid subsequently was denied to Bulgaria. Corruption and judicial concerns also delayed the nation's joining the EU's borderless Schengen Area, and these concerns persisted into the 2010s. Elections in July, 2009, gave the anticorruption Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), led by Sofia Mayor Boiko Borisov, a near majority of the seats in parliament and some 40% of the vote, and Borisov subsequently became prime minister of a minority government. Rosen Plevneliev, the GERB candidate, was elected president in Oct., 2011. The effects of the adoption of austerity measures in the wake of recession, the rising cost of life, and persistent government corruption led in early 2013 to mass

protests that resulted in bloody clashes with police. Borisov's government subsequently resigned (Feb., 2013). New elections were scheduled for May, and an interim government headed by Marin Raikov, a career diplomat and former deputy foreign minister, was appointed.

GERB won a plurality but proved unable to form a government; the Socialists and MRF subsequently supported a technocratic minority government led by former finance minister Plamen Oresharski. The appointment (soon reversed) of a media magnate with no security experience as head of the national security agency led to weeks of anticorruption protests in mid-2013. The country had a banking crisis in June, 2014, when there were runs on two of its largest banks, leading to the failure of one. In July, Oresharski's government resigned; it had lost support after the Socialists did poorly in the May EU elections. Georgi Bliznashki, a law professor and former Socialist legislator, was named interim prime minister in August.

In the Oct., 2014, elections GERB won a plurality of the seats (but only slightly more than a third of them) and formed a government in November with the support of a number of smaller parties; Borisov became prime minister. GERB's coalition gradually lost the support of a number legislators and parties, becoming a minority government in May, 2016. In the presidential election in November, Rumen Radev, a former commander of the air force who was supported by the Socialists, won handily in the runoff, and Borisov then resigned as prime minister. The main parties subsequently proved unable to form a new government, triggering new elections; Ognyan Gerdzhikov, a law professor and former speaker of parliament, became interim prime minister in Jan., 2017. In the March elections GERB placed first and the Socialists second. GERB subsequently (May) formed a government with three nationalist parties, and Borisov again became prime minister.

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