

# Bulgaria - people, culture, language

## A guide for businesses



### The country

**Overview:** Bulgaria traces its foundation as a state to 681 AD. After a period of 500 years as part of the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria became an independent principality in 1878 and a Kingdom in 1908. The Bulgarian People's Republic was proclaimed on 15 September 1946. Following the demise of the Communist regime in November 1989 and the establishment of democracy, the country has now been restyled the Republic of Bulgaria.

**History:** The country is very beautiful with many historic, cultural and tourism attractions. Its fascinating history can be traced back 5,000 years. Two of the most famous names in antiquity were born there, Orpheus and Spartacus.

**Bulgaria today:** Today, it has a population of 7.97 million, with 1.2 million living in the capital city, Sofia. Other major towns include Plovdiv, Varna & Bourgas. The government is currently working towards accession to the EU in 2007. The country has everything: ski-ing, beaches, cultural heritage, monasteries, museums, galleries, ancient tombs, churches, 16 mountains, wine tours, over 550 mineral springs, caves, a coastline of 354 kms, excellent and varied cuisine. The British pound goes a long way in Bulgaria.

**Environment:** Bulgaria is approximately the same size as England in terms of landmass. Its varied topography includes fertile plains and thick wooded mountain ranges.

**People:** the majority of the population is Bulgarian (83%). Turks make up 8.5% and there is a minority Roma population of 2.6%. The people are open, friendly and direct. A very 'cultural' country, Bulgarians love their music, literature and art.

**Religion:** Bulgarian Orthodox 83.8%, Muslim 12.1%, Roman Catholic 1.7%, other 2.4%.



*The Ivan Vazov Theatre in Sofia.*  
Source: European Commission

Information correct on 9 February 2005.

### Business culture and etiquette

#### Before visiting

- Do your research thoroughly.
- Meetings are easy to arrange and conducted professionally.
- Expect punctuality.
- British business people often comment on the Bulgarians' 'can do' approach and willingness to build partnerships.
- Don't visit in July and August, as most business people take vacations.

#### Establishing Working Relationships

- Bulgarians have a genuine interest and affection for all things British: our language, education facilities and history.
- Don't, however, rush into agency agreements and partnerships without proper checks. Use the advice and support available to you from your local UKT&I office or see 'sources' overleaf for some in-country contacts.



*The Rila Monastery in southern Bulgaria.*  
Source: European Commission

### Business and economic climate

**Business and economic climate:** The country is politically stable with a stable currency. It is economically generally stable and performance impressive, given the painful transition from a state-dominated economy to one officially recognised as a market economy in late 2002. Bulgaria is pro EU and has a pro-western stance. As a pre-accession state, Bulgaria is in receipt of large tranches of EU money for structural reform, infrastructure projects and social programmes. Many British companies are already taking advantage of this. Incentives to attract foreign investors include: Lowest taxes in Europe; Low operational costs for water supply and construction works compared to other CEE countries; Free movement of capital; No restrictions on after-tax repatriation of profits; Free trade opportunities within a market of over 550 million customers (EU, EFTA and CEFTA countries, Macedonia, Turkey, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Israel.)

## Language

**Official language:** Bulgarian, which belongs to the group of Slavic languages. Russian and Serbo-Croat are the most similar.

**Other languages:** English is widely used, but outside of Sofia, translators are often required. Translators are often used in meetings in Sofia too, as although English is spoken and understood, some Bulgarians

feel they can express themselves better in their own language to an interpreter. Second languages are German (particularly among the older generation) and Russian. It is very important to ensure that any company literature sent or taken to the country is translated into Bulgarian.

**Finding translators/interpreters:** in the UK, you can search for local, quality-assured translators and interpreters at [www.expertlanguages.com](http://www.expertlanguages.com).

## Basic Bulgarian Phrases

The positive impression you will make by learning to speak a few basic Bulgarian phrases cannot be overestimated. Below are some commonly-used phrases - if you are interested in learning Bulgarian search for quality-assured trainers at [www.expertlanguages.com](http://www.expertlanguages.com)

	Bulgarian	Pronunciation
Hello	Здравей	Zdravey
Good morning	Добро утро	Dobro utro
Good evening	Добър вечер	Dobar vecher
Goodbye	Добйждане	Dovizhdane
Yes / no	Да / Не	Da / Ne
Please	Ако обичате	Ako obichate
Thank you	Благодаря	Blagodarya
How are you?	Как си?	Kak si?
Nice to meet you	Приятно ми е	Priyatno mi e
What's your name?	Как се казваш	Kak se kazvash?

## Signposting and resources

**Expert Language Solutions ([www.expertlanguages.com](http://www.expertlanguages.com))** - a quality-assured service for transcription, subtitling, proof reading, translation, interpreting, language and business culture and etiquette training. You can contact ELS for more detailed information on their Bulgarian language services.

## Using an interpreter

**Before the assignment:** firstly, define the type of interpretation required (whispering or simultaneous). Fully explain the goals and objectives of the meeting or presentation. If you are making a speech or presentation, let your interpreter have a copy of the text in advance. Explain any important or difficult concepts and points. If you are part of a group, make sure they understand that only one person should speak at a time.

**At the assignment:** appreciate that interpretations may take much longer than the original speech. Speak clearly and slowly, and pause regularly - every minute; after a thought is complete; or after you have made a major point.

**Make sure you avoid:** long or complex sentences; slang, jargon, or colloquial expressions; jokes and humorous stories (humour seldom travels well and risks creating misunderstanding or causing offence); and interrupting the interpreter (unless it is really necessary, this can be confusing and appear rude).

## Case study

*"After considering many markets, many on the outside looking more appealing, Bulgaria offered far too many benefits for us to ignore. Regular visits and in-depth research along with the development of long-term relationships means we have a very stable future that will only grow with EU enlargement" - Sarenmo UK.*



Bulgarian farmers dressed in traditional costumes performing a ritual during a traditional national wine festival for a good wine harvest in the village of Ilindenci, some 120km south of Sofia. Source: European Commission

- British Embassy in Bulgaria [www.british-embassy.bg](http://www.british-embassy.bg)
- Foreign Investment Agency [www.bfia.org](http://www.bfia.org)
- Bulgarian Trade Promotion Agency [www.bepc.government.bg](http://www.bepc.government.bg)
- Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry [www.bcci.org](http://www.bcci.org)

## Sources

Research and text: Central European Development Agency (CEDA) 01302 367662  
Euro Information Centre [www.euro-info.org.uk](http://www.euro-info.org.uk)  
International House [www.ihworld.com](http://www.ihworld.com)  
UK Trade & Investment [www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk](http://www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk)  
Photography: European Commission [www.europa.eu.int](http://www.europa.eu.int)

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