



Bulgaria 2014 Crime and Safety Report

Product of the Research & Information Support Center (RISC)

The following is based on open-source reporting.

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Bulgaria is a welcoming country with few specific threats targeting American citizens, businesses, or organizations. Incidents of crime tend to be concentrated in large urban areas. Located strategically as a land gateway between the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe, Bulgaria is one of the key exterior borders of the European Union. While illegal migration and smuggling have challenged law enforcement, the Syrian conflict has exacerbated the migration / refugee situation in the poorest of the EU's member states that struggles with both housing and caring for the asylum seekers and refugees, as well as the political backlash from a vocal minority of ultranationalists, some of whom hold the key to stability for the current Parliament.

The Regional Security Office is using official statistics from the Ministry of Interior (MOI), survey data from the National Crime Survey (NCS) produced by the Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD), data from the National Statistical Institute (NSI), statistics provided by security companies, crime reports by American citizens from the U.S. Embassy's Consular Section, validated open source media reports, and case reports by the U.S. Embassy's Regional Security Office (RSO). According to CSD, the average levels for certain types of crime (i.e. car thefts and burglaries) in Bulgaria are comparable to the levels in most EU Member States, but overall unreported crimes remain higher than the EU average. Discrepancies in numbers between officially reported incidents to police, the Embassy, and survey organizations occur for a variety of reasons; however, the trends over time are helpful in gaining situational awareness and the relative volume of incidents in comparable American and European cities. The NCS has consistently shown that there are significant differences between the number of crimes that victims report and the number of crimes that police register. Some victims may not report crimes to police, and some offices may not register certain crimes that are difficult to solve (ex. pickpocketing, petty crimes). According to the NCS, unreported crimes increased for the third consecutive year, with only 42.4 percent of all crimes being reported to the police.

Crime Threats

A majority of incidents involving U.S. citizens are economic in nature and the low volume, as well as the type of reported incidents, suggests Americans are not being targeted as a nationality. According to the MOI, over the past four years a majority of incidents involving U.S. citizens are economic in nature, including theft, robbery, and motor vehicle theft. ATM skimming, credit card fraud, and traffic incidents remain the most common threats to Americans traveling to Bulgaria.

The MOI reports a 1.4 percent decrease in all registered crimes during 2013 when compared to 2012. Some 39 percent of the cases were resolved in 2013. Over the same period, the Ministry

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and Embassy recorded almost a double digit drop of registered crimes involving American citizens (the number of reported crimes against American citizens to the U.S. Embassy's Consular Section decreased in 2013 by 13 thefts, 1 sexual assault, and 1 stolen car).

While crimes like pickpocketing went up slightly in the past year, there was a dramatic reduction in severe violent crimes like murders over the past year. There were 105 murders in 2013 compared to 138 in 2012. The overall murder rate is more than 50 percent lower than in the United States.

Thefts from homes and non-violent burglaries remain the property crime most often registered with the MOI. According to the NCS, the number of home burglaries and the number of thefts from facilities adjacent to homes increased sharply in 2012 while MOI statistics show that registered thefts in 2013 are only one percent higher compared with the previous year. Registered thefts of homes in 2013 were 13,931, with the concentration in the big cities: Sofia (3,119), Plovdiv (983) and Varna (983). Burglaries predominantly occur at night; however, 25 percent occurred during daylight hours, according to statistics from private security companies. Burglaries of homes are done by professional criminals while thefts from adjacent buildings, and those with no element of burglary, are conducted by opportunistic, non-professional criminals. While professional criminals almost exclusively look for valuables with a quick turnover (cash, jewelry, or electronics), the non-professional ones steal anything they can use, trade, or resell. Registered robberies increased by 3.5 percent in 2013 compared to 2012.

Robberies were mainly concentrated in Sofia, which had 45 percent of all robberies nationwide, along with Burgas, Plovdiv, and Varna. Armed robbery constitutes only five percent of all registered robberies.

The use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by criminal groups against each other and by hate groups remains a challenge for law enforcement, although the total number has decreased precipitously since its height in the 1990s and early 2000s. The MOI registered 21 IED attacks in 2013 compared to 27 in 2012. Authorities disabled another five IEDs in 2013.

Hoax bomb threats continue to be disruptive to businesses, organizations, and the government writ large. Anonymous telephonic bomb threat hoaxes increased in 2013, continuing a frustrating trend for businesses, academia, and law enforcement officials. A total of 271 telephonic bomb threats were registered in 2013, of which 80 cases were closed. Comparatively, 2012 had 259 bomb threat hoax calls and 2011 had 145. The bomb threat calls received were directed at schools, shopping malls, court houses, airports, a railway station, and large office compounds, including where many private American businesses have offices. While these threats were extremely disruptive, the police handled them professionally – both in handling public safety and the follow-up investigations. No actual devices were located during these incidents.

Organized crime continues to challenge Bulgarian authorities, though contract killings largely dropped off following the arrest of four “Killers” gangs since 2010. In 2013, two “Killers” gangs were broken up and are suspected of being responsible for dozens of contract killings. A notable exception was the January 28 sniper-style assassination attempt against an organized crime boss as he arrived at court in central Sofia. Both he and his bodyguard were injured and hospitalized; the shooter escaped and lit the abandoned apartment on fire that had been used to take the shot, complicating any forensics investigation.

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The Southeastern European region poses significant threats from cybercrimes and cyber fraud to both the United States and the rest of Europe. A 2012 study shows that Bulgaria is the fourth major source with seven percent of all global data breaches worldwide based on approximately 47,000 reported cyber-related incidents.

Document forgery is prevalent. The most targeted documents were university diplomas, electronic payment documents, IDs, etc. An investigative journalist, posing as a Ukrainian citizen, documented how a genuine Bulgarian government-issued document, doctored by his picture and with a fake name, could be obtained for 475 British pounds (US\$790) and delivered within 24 hours. A decline was reported in the amount of seized counterfeit currency.

In 2013, there were 36 financial crimes, and 55 crimes registered against banking systems. Value added tax (VAT) fraud cases have been widely covered in the press, as have numerous police operations against groups dealing with VAT fraud. The majority of fraud is intra-EU, making the threat to U.S. business minimal. More than 210 million BGN has been recovered in the past four years.

According to U.S. law enforcement, Bulgaria is the number one source country for ATM and credit card skimming-related crimes in the world. Until recently, Bulgarian transnational organized criminal groups manufactured the skimming devices and sent their teams to other countries to skim credit cards. These groups then sent the proceeds back to their Bulgarian bosses. There was only a moderate amount of actual skimming in Bulgaria, and these were usually to test the devices prior to deploying them abroad. This trend has changed over the past two years, as Bulgarian criminal groups have increased their operations dramatically both domestically and abroad. More criminal groups are installing skimming devices in Bulgaria not only to test the devices but to profit from the skimmed cards. ATM skimming in Sofia, Varna, and Burgas has increased several-fold. Criminal groups target high volume ATMs, usually around tourist areas or shopping centers.

Smuggling illicit goods, weapons, and antiquities is a focus of law enforcement, and in January 2014, the United States and Bulgaria signed a Cultural Preservation Treaty to enhance law enforcement's ability to stop the theft of artifacts from Bulgaria. In May 2013, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement returned to Bulgarian authorities 546 stolen and smuggled antique coins. Numerous sizable operations against contraband cigarettes have been conducted, to include one where 14 million pieces were intercepted at the port of Varna. In 2013, more than 56 million pieces of contraband cigarettes were seized compared to 109 million pieces in 2012. The seized contraband alcohol was 76,835 liters in 2013 compared to 98,439 liters in 2012. As a result of increased enforcement, Bulgarian Customs officials report significant increases in fees collected from paid excise taxes in 2013.

Official corruption is also a serious and wide-spread problem. A survey by the Center for the Study of Democracy indicates a gradual decline in the proportion of people pressured into committing corrupt acts. However, according to the Center for Prevention and Countering Corruption and Organized Crime, 98 percent of public procurement deals are won by only two percent of the companies in Bulgaria. "Inefficiency and corruption within the judiciary system are considered a major stumbling block in Bulgaria's battle against the high-level corruption and organized crime. Americans are most likely to encounter corruption at state run medical facilities and from traffic police," according to the Center for Liberal Strategies.

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Harassment of minorities by skinheads and neo-Nazis has been reported more frequently throughout the region, including in Bulgaria.

Overall Road Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Overcharging by taxi drivers, poor road conditions, and aggressive driving are the most frequent threats faced by Americans in Bulgaria. Four wheel drive (4WD) vehicles are recommended, particularly for secondary roads.

Road conditions are generally underdeveloped except for some of the main roads and highways that have been renovated or newly constructed over the past few years. Many major highways and roads are still under construction. Highway Trakiya, connecting Sofia with Burgas, was completed in 2013, significantly reducing travel time across the country. Also in 2013, nearly 20 percent of the Motorway Struma connecting Sofia with Kulata, a major border checkpoint with Greece, is now functional. Heavy truck traffic along two-lane roads from the Greek border at Kulata to Sofia and from the Turkish border at Kapitan Andreevo to Plovdiv create numerous hazards. Motorists should expect long delays at border crossings. During 2014, the government plans to continue construction of new highways and renovate roadways, including main boulevards and some secondary roads in the larger cities. This will cause heavy traffic in these areas and could lead to more accidents.

Travel conditions deteriorate during the winter, as roads become icy, and potholes become larger. Traffic difficulties are experienced even on small streets in Sofia, where the snow is not cleared during the winter season, and residents must have a 4WD vehicle in order to drive safely. Rockslides and landslides may be encountered in the mountains and Black Sea areas.

Aggressive driving habits, the lack of safe infrastructure, and a mixture of late model and older vehicles, livestock, and animal-drawn carts on the roads contribute to road accidents and fatalities. A form of "Russian road roulette" has taken hold in Sofia wherein drivers make bets about speeding through red lights in excess of 120 mph in the late hours of the evening; bets are also taken challenging drivers to go the wrong way around roundabouts at high speeds. While the number of registered traffic accidents in Bulgaria was up 3.4 percent in 2013 compared to 2012, the number of fatalities stayed almost the same. The total number of registered fatalities in Bulgaria for 2013 was 597 compared to 601 for 2012. Bulgaria has 7.9 road deaths per 100,000 compared to the EU average of 3.0 in 100,000 in 2012. The total number of registered injuries for 2013 was 8,676 compared to 8,193 in 2012, an increase of almost six percent. Further, in some cities, traffic lights blink yellow in all directions late at night leaving right-of-way unclear and contributing to accidents.

Motorists should avoid confrontations with aggressive drivers. In particular, many drivers of late-model sedans speed and drive dangerously. Motorists should exercise caution and avoid altercations with the drivers of these vehicles, which may be driven by armed organized crime figures. Violent altercations are not unheard of, including some where firearms were used to threaten other drivers.

All drivers are obliged to observe local traffic laws, which in some cases are different from those in the U.S. The enforcement of the Traffic Act falls on the Bulgarian Traffic Police. Bulgarian law allows Americans to use their U.S. driver's license for up to one year; however, an international driving permit is recommended. Drivers operating motor vehicles must obey the signals given by traffic police officers. All fines for traffic violations are paid either electronically or via wire bank transfer. Traffic Act details can be located at: http://www.mvr.bg/NR/ronlyres/8714091D-3F2D-4C6E-9544-90BA1F8D2C9C/0/04_Law_Traffic_EN.pdf

Bus transportation is more reliable than train transportation, as the inter-city buses are newer, more frequent, relatively fast, and more comfortable. The last serious bus accident occurred in June 2011 when a bus travelling overturned and caught fire on Trakiya highway near Plovdiv. Eight passengers died, and there were 18 injuries.

There have been several fires on trains over the past few years. Criminals do operate on trains, so more attention is recommended for passengers while they travel by train.

Sofia has a rather new, opened in August 2012, metro that is modern, clean, and relatively safe.

Airline transportation is reliable, and there have been no registered airplane accidents in the past 30 years. The national carrier, Bulgaria Air, is in compliance with the safety standards of the International Civil Aviation Organization. There are few reports of thefts, scams, ATM skimming or pick-pocketing at any of the four major airports (Sofia, Plovdiv, Burgas, and Varna). The most prevalent issue reported is over-charging taxis. They usually drive around in front of the airport and have an accomplice inside trying to lure travelers to their taxis. Some of their logos are designed to look like other companies (ex. "CK" vs. "OK"). The official taxi companies have desks inside the arrival terminals, and it is recommended that taxis be ordered at these desks.

Some criminals reportedly have impersonated traffic police and impose "fines" or even steal vehicles and personal belongings on major roadways. While this type of highway robbery largely ended in 2009 when authorities broke up an organized crime group, a similar incident in December 2012 resurrected this tactic near Haskovo. General targets are foreigners in vehicles with foreign license plates who carry and display large amounts of cash.

Europe's open borders and uneven patchwork of vehicle databases make car theft relatively easy. Thefts of vehicles and fraud on the roads are also possible. The declining trend of car thefts from the last three years ended in 2013 and showed that those crimes are still an issue for the region. MOI registered 15.6 percent more car thefts in 2013 compared to 2012, with almost half of them being stolen in Sofia. According to open sources, Bulgarian insurance companies registered a 50 percent increase in car thefts in 2013. Car thieves target new, luxury cars such as Mercedes, BMW, Audi, and different models of SUVs but also older cars that are usually dismantled and sold for parts. In the last few years, the main markets for the stolen vehicles are the Middle East, Albania, and Kosovo. Bulgarian law enforcement agencies worked closely with their European counterparts in 2012 and conducted numerous joint operations against the Balkan car mafia, which is among the best organized and most dangerous in Europe.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

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Bulgaria's population is generally peaceful in its political orientation. Since the democratic changes in 1989, there have been several democratic and non-violent transfers of government power. Bulgaria remains a country with low instances of political violence that has not targeted Americans.

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns.

On July 18, 2012, Lebanese Hizballah operatives detonated explosives beneath a bus of Israeli tourists outside the arrivals terminal at the Burgas airport. The attack killed five Israelis and their Bulgarian bus driver and injured 32 Israelis. The investigation continued through 2013, and indictments are possible in 2014.

Bulgaria is a key land transit country for the illegal movement of people and contraband, due primarily to its strategic location. This also makes Bulgaria a key transit point for transnational terrorists trying to move by land into Europe, and it highlights the significant responsibility the Bulgarians bear as a chokepoint into the European Union. A large and unprecedented influx of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and North and West African countries challenged the capabilities and effectiveness of the border police and the Bulgarian State Agency for National Security, as there are concerns that this process will allow terrorists to transit the country. The total number of detained individuals who illegally crossed the entry border was 11,618 in 2013 compared to 2,536 for the previous year. Seven illegal immigrants suspected of having ties with terrorist organizations were extradited in 2013. Bulgarian authorities infrequently publicize interdiction of terrorists in country; however, the past four years have seen a steady stream of successful cases. For example, In August 2013, authorities arrested a Turkish terrorist leader attempting to enter Bulgaria with a fake ID at Malko Tarnovo border cross point. In August 2012, two men wanted by Interpol on terrorism related charges were arrested in Ruse near the Romanian border. In 2011, police arrested Monahem Goujih and extradited him to France, and they arrested Ahmed Chataev, a suspected Chechen terrorist, as he attempted to leave Bulgaria at the Turkish border.

Civil Unrest

Protests have become commonplace in Bulgaria and in Sofia in particular. The largest protest in 2013 was anti-government that peaked in July at over 20,000 protesters but as of January 2014 more routinely drew 50-100 people per day. This movement has been predominantly non-violent despite attempts by some provocateurs to infiltrate the demonstrations and manufacture conflicts. A small pro-government protest movement conducted counter-demonstrations. Overall, the anti-government protesters and police have demonstrated a mutual respect and largely avoided violence, including protestors pointing out troublemakers to the police and, during the hot summer, leaving water alongside police routes. During many of the summer and weekend protests, families marched alongside their children and pets creating an atmosphere that discouraged conflict. In July, during a protestor blockade of the National Assembly that trapped MPs and ministers inside, the clash between protestors and police resulted in minor injuries to 10 people. Additionally, some light clashes arose during student protests or late evening protests; however, the police have not utilized dispersion devices or conducted mass arrests.

Other demonstrations targeted particular policies, such as the Syrian refugee issue and government subsidies for livestock breeders. Opposition to particular sectors, such as the

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energy sector, may target Americans or American businesses due to their affiliation with the issue vice any particular anti-Americanism. There were also small and peaceful protests against U.S. policies, such as intervention in Syria and a specific U.S. extradition request.

In January 2013, 25-year old ethnic Turk Oktay Enimehmedov stormed the stage during a meeting of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) political party and pointed a gas pistol loaded with blank ammunition and pepper spray at the head of the party leader, Ahmed Dogan. His pistol misfired three times before participants and bodyguards subdued him.

Anti-government protests targeted three successive governments throughout the year in two distinct phases. The first phase began in Blagoevgrad on January 28, 2013, caused by abnormally high electricity bills. The protests later spread throughout the country and turned into a movement against the GERB-led government and the existing political system. The nationwide protests turned violent, and the center-right government resigned on February 20. The surprise resignation led to the appointment of a caretaker government and early elections in May 2013. A surprise for all observers was the seven self-immolations during these protests – a tactic not typical for Bulgaria. The second phase of civil unrest started against the newly-elected Socialist-led cabinet, consisting of political figures and technocrats and supported by the ethnic-Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedom (MRF) party. (Since the two parties do not have the necessary majority in Parliament, they receive support from the nationalist Ataka party to maintain a quorum.) Initially, demonstrations started as a protest by ecological activists against the nomination of a minister who was allegedly involved in a controversial construction project in protected areas and linked to organized crime figures. More serious protests erupted on June 14, 2013, in response to the election of a controversial media mogul and MRF MP as chairman of the restructured and strengthened State Agency for National Security. The protests have continued, though with much smaller numbers. On the night of July 23-24, more than 100 Members of Parliament, Ministers, and journalists spent part of the night barricaded inside the Parliament building, before the police removed protestors. In October, university students joined the anti-government protests and occupied lecture halls at universities. These anti-government protests are still ongoing in 2014 with few violent confrontations between the protestors and the police.

In addition to the anti-government protests, counter-protests and protests against the Bulgarian President took place in 2013. The counter-protests have generally seen less turnout compared to the anti-government protests and have not been violent.

Parliamentary elections for the EU will take place in May 2014. Depending on the results of this election, new early Parliamentary elections are possible. OSAC notes that some past election cycles have seen protest activity, localized violence, blocking of main roads and government buildings, and minor incidents (arson, vandalism acts, provocations, explosions, etc.) in and around political party offices, events, politicians, etc.

Ultrnationalist parties use threats and intimidation as political tools to make headlines and garner support from their loyalists. The Ataka party has employed anti-American, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-LGBT, and anti-Roma rhetoric. Party supporters have not attacked Americans but have held loud, but peaceful, protests at the Embassy. Also of concern are some of the smaller nationalist parties who started “anti-immigrant patrols” in areas of Sofia where refugees congregated; these nationalist groups sometimes roam in packs and wear arm bands. While some mainstream Bulgarian media have condemned these “patrols,” the trend and

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visibility of their activities has been concerning for minorities. Ataka offices in Sofia and Ruse were vandalized in 2013, and a Roma support organization organized counter-patrols in response to the nationalist patrols. This escalation of extrajudicial ethnic patrolling led to an RSO Security Advisory, OSAC notice, and accompanying Consular message to American citizens. Ultranationalist parties also drew smaller crowds to protest the LGBT pride parade and America's military activities against Bulgaria during World War II. There are several small anti-American political parties, organizations, and sub-cultures in the country. Most active are the ultranationalists from the "Ataka" and "VMRO" political parties, the nationalists from the youth organization "BNU," and followers of the sub-culture "Skinheads." Most neo-Nazi and extreme right groups are associated with soccer fan clubs and publicly demonstrate their associations during soccer games.

Religious or Ethnic Violence.

The Bulgarian President and Prime Ministers voiced concerns in a joint declaration about the rise of xenophobia, racism, and extreme nationalism in the society, and declarations of concern have been publicized by organizations such as Amnesty International, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee and the "Shalom" Jewish organization in Bulgaria.

Traditionally, ethnic violence tended to be focused on Roma; however, the Embassy has received a number of reports from Americans of African, South Asian, and South American descent of being singled out for harassment, both verbal and physical.

Some minorities experience ethnic and religious vandalism, intimidation, and assaults and have expressed concern over the founding of new nationalist parties that include members of neo-Nazi groups. Open sources routinely report assaults against Muslims, Roma, and foreigners as well as vandalism of mosques, synagogues, churches, and other places of worship. When religious or ethnic organizations contemporaneously report incidents – especially when camera footage is available to document the incident – the police have generally been responsive. Attacks against refugees and immigrants escalated at the end of 2013. Open source and police have reported at least seven cases of refugees or immigrants who have been assaulted by members of far right-groups armed with knives and chains.

No serious incidents of anti-Roma or anti-Turkish violence were registered in 2013. However, isolated incidents can quickly ignite and flame tensions nationwide. In September 2011, protests erupted in Plovdiv, following the death of a 19-year old Bulgarian male in Katunitsa. The Roma driver of the vehicle that killed the boy claimed it was an accident; however, the investigating magistrate ruled it an intentional hit-and-run case. Villagers marched on the Roma clan leader's compound, overturning several of his vehicles and burning several of his buildings. Violent protests, some being anti-Roma, spread over two weeks to several other cities and villages, to include Sofia, Varna, Burgas, Stara Zagora, and Pernik. Instances of violence were mainly fueled by members of various soccer fan clubs, motorcycle groups, and VMRO.

Religious violence tends to be focused on Muslims or Christian missionary groups. Missionaries continue to be the target of verbal and physical harassment, with numerous reports of minor assaults. Beginning in April 2012, missionaries in Stara Zagora were repeatedly harassed by youth culminating in an assault in January 2013. Assaults against missionaries continued throughout 2013 including in Burgas, Pleven, and Ruse. Four incidents were registered when missionaries had been threatened directly and indirectly by aggressive people, both youths and

older aged individuals, who have had guns or knives. Additionally, the assailants yelled anti-American insults and sprayed anti-American graffiti on two churches' doors and windows. MOI officials are investigating.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Bulgaria is in a seismically active area, making it susceptible to earthquakes; however, there were no registered earthquakes over 4.5 during 2013. The last significant earthquake occurred on May 22, 2012, and registered a 5.8 on the Richter scale. Its epicenter was 15 miles from Sofia, close to Pernik. Earthquakes are unpredictable; therefore, American and OSAC constituents are urged to take reasonable steps to prepare themselves and review safety measures. Have an earthquake survival kit, an emergency plan, and a plan for accountability after an earthquake. Make sure your associates know how to turn off gas, water, and electricity. Do not place heavy objects over beds or office desks. Keep heavy objects lower than the height of shortest person. During an earthquake, stay calm! If inside, stand in a doorway or crouch under a desk or table. Stay away from windows or glass dividers. If outside, stand away from buildings, trees, and telephone and electrical lines. If on the road, drive away from underpasses and overpasses; stop in a safe area; stay in vehicle. After an earthquake, move to a safe place and prepare for aftershocks. Wear shoes. Check for injuries. Provide first aid if needed. Turn off utilities. Turn on the radio and listen for instructions from public safety agencies. When safe, conduct a safety check for gas, water breaks, downed power lines, and shortages. Move vehicles to a safe area. Check for building damage and potential problems.

Emergency supplies should be adequate for at least three days; a 10-day supply of water, food, and medicine is recommended. It might prove useful to include: passport or other picture IDs; other important documents like medical/real estate insurance, copy of a will, real estate deed, etc.; about \$100 cash.

The heaviest rains and thunderstorms take place during the spring and autumn. Code orange was declared in eight regions and code yellow for the rest of the country during downpours on April 7, 2013. A 20-year old woman on May 14, 2013 after being hit by scaffolding swept by storm winds in Gabrovo when parts of the country were hit by severe windy weather. Do not drive unless necessary, and if you are on the road, safely pull onto the shoulder of the road away from any trees that could fall on the vehicle. Stay in the car and turn on the emergency flashers until the heavy rain subsides.

Flooding primarily occurs during the spring and winter in areas close to water sources. Floods are more likely in the smaller villages and towns due to insufficient infrastructure to handle heavy spring rainstorms and winter runoff. In January 2013, melting snow and heavy rain in the southern district of Smolyan and Kardzhali increased the levels of some reservoirs and rivers. The situation was critical, as a river overflowed a road section between Nedelino and Krayna. Do not drive through flooded areas.

Forest and wild fires are more likely in mountain areas during the summer time. During 2013, there were 171 fires reported, a 50 percent reduction compared to 2012. The southern part of Bulgaria is most susceptible to major fires. Wildfires were concentrated in the regions of Sofia, Haskovo, Kyustendil, Burgas and Pazardzhik in the south.

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Cold weather and sizable snow falls during the winter can cause serious transportation problems, floods, and electrical outages. In case of heavy snowfall, roads may not be plowed or salted and can be extremely dangerous and closed to traffic. Hiking during winter storms and extremely cold weather is not recommended. One person was killed by an avalanche in the Rila Mountains on December 26, 2013.

Hot weather during the summer time can cause serious transportation and health problems. In late July, a code orange for extremely hot weather was declared with temperatures reaching 100-104 degrees Fahrenheit. It is recommended that all people exercise caution, avoid excessive physical activity, and drink ample amounts of non-alcoholic fluids, especially water. Older people, children, and people suffering from heart disease should avoid prolonged exposure.

A European study found that Bulgaria has the most polluted air among EU countries. Four of Europe's cities with the highest levels of particulate matter are Bulgarian: Pernik, Plovdiv, Pleven and Dobrich. High concentrations of particulates were found in the air in Pernik - about 180 days of the year compared to about 15 days a year for Paris and Stuttgart. It has the highest concentrations of two major varieties of particulate matter, which are tiny airborne droplets or gas particles that come from vehicle tailpipes, smokestacks, and wood/coal used for home heating and a variety of other sources. They can lead to health problems from asthma to cancer. Bulgaria also has the highest concentration of carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxide.

Industrial and Transportation Accidents

There were several industrial accidents in 2013. On July 16, 2013, the Oranovo coal mine close to Simiti collapsed, causing the death of four miners; a fifth miner died later from a heart attack during the rescue operation. On August 14, 2013, a gas tanker wagon at the Ezerovo railway station seven miles west of Varna exploded injuring 11 people, including seven firefighters. A gas explosion at a Chinese restaurant in Sofia injured 11 people in August, and in December, an electrical incident at the Lukoil Neftochim oil refinery in Burgas killed one worker and injured three others.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

According to a report of the European Commission for 2012, Bulgaria's external borders are the fourth largest source of fake goods confiscated in the EU. The same report identifies Bulgaria as the biggest offender for packaging materials. Several companies have reported difficulty when seeking recourse for patent and trademark infringement at the Bulgarian Patent Office.

Privacy Concerns

Bulgaria has a combination of talented computer programmers and a tradition of organized crime. ATM skimming, computer hacking, and other electronic intrusions are a risk for people traveling to and operating in Bulgaria. American businesses involved in high profile and politically charged sectors such as energy, finance, or similar industries with a higher risk of privacy concerns should contact their corporate security headquarters or consult with the Regional Security Office about specific issues and countermeasures.

Drug-related Crimes

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Bulgaria is a “gateway” country in the transit of illicit drugs and contraband. Bulgaria serves as a major trans-shipment point for heroin from southwest Asia along the Balkan route to Europe. Organized crime groups in Bulgaria are heavily involved in drug trafficking and other forms of crime. Heroin and synthetic drugs are the primary drugs transported through Bulgaria, principally via overland methods of transportation, including Transport International Routier (TIR) trucks, passenger vehicles, buses, vans, and small trucks. Small amounts are smuggled by air. Varna and Burgas ports are used as entry points for controlled substances, including cocaine, that are smuggled into the Balkans, Greece, and Western Europe. In recent years, there has been a steady rise in cocaine smuggling from South America to Bulgaria based on the high price of cocaine in Europe.

Drug abuse and drug addiction continue to climb while the age of drug use the first time is dropping. In 2004, a total of 2,412 drug-related crimes were registered; in 2010, 3,765 were registered. Eurostat has reported that drug-related crimes in Bulgaria are rising. In 2013, 55 kg of heroin, 1.15 kg of cocaine, 4,447 kg of marijuana, 28,861 kg of cannabis, 14.6 kg of hashish, 107 kg of synthetic drugs, and 376 liters precursors were seized. Bulgaria is also a transit country for chemicals such as Acetic Anhydride (AA). Notably, in 2010, law enforcement authorities seized over 23 tons of AA.

Kidnapping Threats

Kidnapping by organized crime largely dropped off following the arrest of the “Impudent” gang in December 2009. This organized crime group was accused of at least 13 high-profile abductions in 2008-2009.

On March 5, 2013, the 10-year old daughter of a Bulgarian organized crime figure was violently kidnapped by three armed masked men while she left for school. Her bodyguard/driver was shot twice in the back. The girl was released after 48 days in captivity.

On April 29, 2013, a failed kidnapping incident occurred as two businessmen were attacked by three armed individuals with masks while getting into a car parked in an underground garage in the early morning. One of the businessmen pulled out a legally owned gun and fired at the perpetrators after which they fled.

In a Catfish scam, an 18-year old American citizen created an online female personality, “Kate,” and perpetrated an ongoing online “relationship” with a male classmate. He initiated an international manhunt when the non-existent female alleged she had been kidnapped in Bulgaria and made calls to Regional Security Offices at two Embassies. The alert prompted a search of hotels and hostels by local authorities. Through online investigations, authorities traced the fictitious Kate back to Andriy Mykhaylivskyy who admitted the “joke” in an interview with federal investigators. Mykhaylivskyy was arrested in New Jersey and charged with making false statements to a United States official. The Regional Security Office does not assess these cases as indicative of a trend targeting U.S. citizens or businesses.

Police Response

Traffic police officers are not allowed to give you an on-the-spot fine for minor traffic violations, according to modifications in the Traffic Act. A request for spot fines is a form of extortion.

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How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

In cases of lawful police detention or police harassment, all U.S. citizens are encouraged to contact the American Citizen Services unit in the Consular Section at the U.S. Embassy immediately for advice and assistance. The ACS emergency number is: (+359) 2 937 5101 or e-mail at: ACS_Sofia@state.gov

Where to Turn to for Assistance if you Become a Victim of Crime

If an American citizen is a victim of a crime, the victim should dial the National System for Single European Emergency Call Number (NSSEECN): 112, which is accessible in all European countries on all landline and mobile phones including mobile phones without a SIM card or with a locked keyboard. NSSEECN-112 accepts emergency calls on Bulgarian territory (in Bulgarian and English languages) and can connect callers with emergency services in response to a wide range of emergencies.

In addition, it is highly recommended that all U.S. citizens report criminal incidents to the American Citizen Services unit in the Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy for assistance. The ACS emergency number is: (+359) 2 937 5101 or e-mail at: ACS_Sofia@state.gov

Various Police/Security Agencies

The Ministry of Interior (MOI) is the primary law enforcement body. The MOI encompasses the National Police Service, Border Police, Fire Safety and Civil Protection, Migration, Specialized Unit for Combating Terrorism, and oversees the 28 regional police directorates and over 180 police stations. With more than 55,000 employees, the Ministry oversees the vast mission of law enforcement, national security, public order, fire safety, border security, immigration, and traffic enforcement. Most interactions American citizens have with law enforcement are with MOI employees. The MOI launched an outreach campaign targeting crimes against tourists, allocating additional resources and training to officers on the Black Sea coast during tourist season.

The Bulgarian Customs Administration is a centralized administrative structure, organized within the National Customs Agency (NCS) under the Minister of Finance. NCS counteracts the contraband channels of goods, drugs, etc. It also is responsible for collecting all duties and excises paid to the state budget.

The National Investigative Service (NIS) is the investigative arm of the Prosecution Service, which is part of the Judiciary. The NIS works with the Ministries of Interior and Justice to bring prosecution through the court process.

The National Protection Service (NSO) provides protective security to Bulgaria's national leadership including the president, prime minister, and visiting government dignitaries but does not conduct criminal investigations.

The State Agency for National Security (DANS) is a domestic security agency with investigative responsibility and since May 2013, with some enforcement authority after merging into its structure most of the responsibilities of the closed MOI Chief Directorate for Combating

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Organized Crime. The amendments in the law also include that the Chairman of DANS will be elected or dismissed and that the work of the agency will be controlled by the Parliament rather than the Council of Ministers. DANS works in close coordination with intelligence services and law enforcement agencies depending on the nature of the investigation.

Medical Emergencies

The quality of the medical services in Sofia and other major cities is generally adequate but is not up to the standards of other Western countries. Medical care and hospital accommodations outside Sofia may be inadequate, and advanced technology and qualified medical specialists may be lacking. Shortages of routine medications and supplies may be experienced. Most public hospitals do not accept credit cards. Medical care is generally better in private hospitals. They offer a broad spectrum of medical services and cater to foreigners. They accept cash payments, bank transfers, international and national credit/debit cards, and payment from some international insurance companies. In the event of a serious or complicated medical condition, medical evacuation to Western Europe is often recommended.

In the event of a medical emergency, call the national emergency number (112) to request an ambulance. Based on the medical condition, the ambulance will transport the patient to the nearest or most appropriate public hospital/clinic for treatment. Dispatchers are unlikely to speak English, and this service will not transport a person to any private hospital. Ambulance service can be slow; in large cities it may take more than 30 minutes for an ambulance to respond. If there is a medical emergency and you are in Sofia, it may be quicker to call a taxi or ask a friend/someone to drive you to a hospital.

Contact Information for Recommended Local Hospitals and Clinics

The list below is for convenience to American citizens and in no way constitutes an official recommendation by the U.S. government or its representatives.

“Pirogov” - Specialized Hospital for Emergency Medicine

Address: 21 Totleben Blvd., phone: +359 2 915 4411; +359 2 915 4290

<http://www.pirogov.bg/Default.aspx?alias=www.pirogov.bg/en>

Pirogov Hospital is considered to be one of the better hospitals in Sofia for many medical emergencies. Pirogov has some unique sections, such as the National Center for Burn Management, Pediatric Surgery, National Toxicology Center, and Pediatric Urology and Trauma Clinics. Pirogov hospital is also specialized for emergency medical cases connected with children.

Military Medical Academy

Address: 3 Georgi Sofiyski Street, phone: +359 2 922 6000; +359 2 922 6111

<http://www.vma.bg>

The specialists in the Military Medical Academy have the experience to treat shooting, stabbing, or mass trauma as a result of an explosion.

Tokuda Hospital Sofia

Address: 51B Nikola Vaptsarov Blvd., phone: +359 2 403 4000; +359 2 403 4112

<http://www.tokudabolnica.bg/en>

A more detailed list of hospitals, doctors, and clinics can be found at: http://bulgaria.usembassy.gov/list_of_hospitals2.html

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

There are no air ambulance services in Bulgaria. Such a service is available in:

International SOS – Geneva: +41 22 785 6464, Fax: + 41 22 785 6424
Frankfurt: +49 61 023 588, Fax: +49 61 022 02644

CDC Country-Specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

The risk of traveler's diarrhea is moderate in deluxe accommodation but high everywhere else. Precautions in eating and drinking are recommended. The consumption of raw sprouts should be avoided. Individuals should carry loperamide and/or quinolone antibiotic for presumptive self-treatment.

Bulgaria, while not in the highest risk category, has an incident rate of 25 cases of tuberculosis per 100,000.

The highest number of cases of Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever is reported during the summer. Transmission is via infected ticks or contact with blood or infected tissue of livestock. Lyme disease presents a risk to travelers. Most cases are reported from the northern regions and lowlands and the Black Sea coast, including cities, through the warmer months. Tick precautions are recommended for both ailments.

Avian influenza H5N1, excreted ilarge amounts in the droppings of infected birds, has been confirmed in Bulgaria in migrating birds but not in poultry. The last case in birds was reported in April 2010. Risk for individuals is minimal.

A key resource for health information is the Travelers' Health page of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website at <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/bulgaria.htm>. The CDC website also provides general guidance on health precautions, such as safe food and water precautions and insect-bite protection. The CDC also maintains an international travelers' hotline at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747) or, by fax, at 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299).

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Crimes/Scams

Be wary of skimming devices placed on ATMs. Take actions to protect your PIN code while entering it, although that does not eliminate the risk. U.S. citizens should review their credit reports, use ATM machines only inside trusted banks and similar institutions, and limit use of credit cards to trusted retailers and institutions. Closely monitor your bank statements for anomalies. Privacy information should be destroyed by shredder or similar destruction method.

In 2013, vehicle central locking signal jamming arose as an emerging trend of incidents in Sofia. Thieves are using radio frequency jammers to block the victim's car key fob that can unlock a vehicle. When the vehicle owner walks away, the criminals easily and quickly steal

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contents/valuables from the vehicle and can even steal the vehicle using hi-tech devices to program a new key. These incidents are prevalent at shopping centers, gas station convenience stores, and school drop-off areas. Drivers should ensure they lock their vehicle and be attentive to the the lights/noises they expect to occur when they use their key fobs.

Organized crime groups have a strong influence in some bars/nightclubs and control a great deal of the prostitution business. Special attention should be paid to the drink prices at high-end bars and nightclubs. There have been instances of visitors charged exorbitant prices. Bills have been as high as several hundred dollars for drinks, and in some establishments, the management may use force to secure payment.

Another scam involves a suspect(s) puncturing a victim's tire. While the driver changes the tire, the suspect(s) burglarizes the vehicle.

Best Security Practices

Maintain a low profile. Dress down, use alcohol sparingly, and avoid disputes.

When using forms of mass transit or moving in crowded markets, shopping streets, malls, etc. be particularly wary of pickpockets. Be aware of diversions. Pickpocketing is often preceded by a diversion in the form of an argument or fight. If you see a commotion nearby, protect your valuables, and evacuate the area quickly. Similarly, do not engage strangers in conversation. Many street crimes and scams begin with a stranger approaching the victim and engaging them in conversation. If approached, ignore the subject and quickly walk away. Keep your bag(s) fastened and try to avoid using a backpack. Safeguard your bag when in cafes or restaurants and while using public transportation. Do not leave your luggage unattended. Visitors should be wary of beggars and people selling trinkets and other items.

Avoid leaving valuables in plain view, especially in cars with foreign license plates, and exercise caution while stopping at gas stations, motels, or roadside restaurants. Visitors should insure their cars against theft with one of the major insurance companies. Cars have been reported stolen when drivers leave their vehicle with the engine running during cold weather.

It is recommended to use an official taxi company.

People who plan to reside on a long-term basis should take measures to protect their dwellings, including installing window grills/shutters, solid doors with secure locks, and an alarm system that is monitored by a security company with an armed response capability. Multiple break-ins have been reported with the tenants inside their homes. Do not keep valuables in visible places or close to entry and balcony doors.

Companies that plan to open offices in Bulgaria should take measures to protect their offices. Some bank vaults and private company offices have reportedly been broken into using jamming equipment in an attempt to circumvent alarm systems.

It is important to be aware that body language is different than in the United States. Even those living in Bulgaria for years may not pick up on subtle changes in body language that could provide warning of hostile intent. Understanding and acknowledging this limitation and a heightened awareness is important for all travelers and expatriates. Shaking one's head side to

side (“no” in the U.S.) means “yes” in Bulgaria, and likewise an up and down nodding (“yes” in the U.S.) means “no” in Bulgaria. This body language can be very disconcerting for newcomers and takes some adjustment. Many Bulgarian businessmen may adjust their nodding to the non-Bulgarian version when speaking English.

Even demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and escalate into violence. Avoid areas of demonstrations and exercise caution if in the vicinity of any large gatherings, protests, or demonstrations. Review personal security plans, remain aware of surroundings including local events, monitor local news stations for updates, and report specific incidences of targeted violence to the U.S. Embassy in Sofia.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contract Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Sofia
16 Kozyak Steet
Sofia 1408, Bulgaria

The Consular Section is open Monday – Friday, except on American and Bulgarian official holidays.

Embassy Contact Numbers

Telephone operators: +359 2 937 5100 or +359 2 939 5500

For emergencies (including death, serious injury, serious illness, criminal assault, arrest, and emergency need for financial assistance) involving American citizens 24 hours a day call: +359 2 937-5101 (via the Duty Officer)

Fax number: +359 2 937 5320

Official websites: <http://bulgaria.usembassy.gov>, <http://sofia.usembassy.gov>

General e-mail Box: sofia@usembassy.bg

The U.S. Embassy’s Consular Office is available to assist American citizens. Bulgaria has an active OSAC Country Council, American Chamber of Commerce, and U.S. Foreign Commercial Office supporting the U.S. private sector. Bulgaria is an attractive environment for foreign investors. Bulgaria offers a highly skilled work force, low labor costs, and low taxes. Before doing business in Bulgaria, American companies should check with the U.S. Embassy’s Foreign Commercial Service office and American Chamber of Commerce regarding potential local business partners.

If you are going to visit or live in Bulgaria, please take a time to tell the U.S. Embassy about your plans. If you enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) at: <https://step.state.gov/step/>, the Embassy can keep you up to date with important safety and security announcements, and help your family and friends get in touch in an emergency. Also, pay attention to Warden Messages published on Embassy and OSAC websites: <http://bulgaria.usembassy.gov> and www.osac.gov

OSAC Country Council information

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The Overseas Security Advisory Council stands ready to assist American companies with security-related information. The OSAC Bulgaria Country Council's Charter was signed on November 29, 2012. Over 70 companies are part of OSAC Bulgaria Country Council, with representation in many different sectors including High Tech, Energy, Academia, Entertainment, Retail, Banking/Finance, Service, Logistics, and Religious Organizations. If you are interested in getting more information about Bulgarian Country Council, please contact the Regional Security Office either by phone or via e-mail at: Office: +359 2 937 5316 or e-mail: DS_RSO_Sofia@state.gov.

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