



# Weekly Briefing

**Bulgaria external relations briefing:**  
**The Visit of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Bulgaria**  
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## **The Visit of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Bulgaria**

### **Summary**

*Undoubtedly, the most important foreign policy event for Bulgaria this month was the visit of the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, at the invitation of the Bulgarian Prime Minister Nikolay Denkov. In addition to the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Zelenskyy also met with Bulgarian President Rumen Radev and other Bulgarian politicians. Bulgaria and Ukraine agreed to intensify their cooperation in the defense sector. Zelenskyy and Denkov discussed another package of military aid for the Ukrainian army. Bulgaria is committed to participating in the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine. President Zelensky and Prime Minister Denkov also signed a bilateral political declaration in support of the Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine when it becomes possible. In addition, the energy ministers of the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding expressing the desire of both countries to exchange scientific-technical, engineering and operational experience for the more efficient use of renewable energy sources and new energy technologies. However, the meeting between the Ukrainian president and the Bulgarian president Rumen Radev took place in a much more tense spirit. The Bulgarian president stood against sending weapons to Ukraine and called for negotiations between Kiev and Moscow. The Ukrainian president opposed the positions of his Bulgarian colleague on the war in Ukraine.*

On July 4, Bulgarian media spread information that the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy will visit Bulgaria on July 6. In the evening of the same day, the Council of Ministers said that they could not confirm that news, but later Defense Minister Todor Tagarev admitted about the upcoming visit. The reason for the secret preparation of the visit was explained with security reasons.<sup>1</sup>

The news of Zelenskyy's visit coincided with a decision by the parliamentary Foreign Policy Committee, taken on July 4, to approve the draft declaration in support of Ukraine's membership in NATO. The exact adoption of the declaration by the National Assembly took place on the day of the visit of the Ukrainian president, two days later.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mediapool.bg/gotvi-se-vizita-na-volodimir-zelenski-v-bulgaria-obnovena-news349228.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mediapool.bg/gotvi-se-vizita-na-volodimir-zelenski-v-bulgaria-obnovena-news349228.html>

Volodymyr Zelenskyy arrived in Sofia with Bulgarian government plane on July 6.<sup>3</sup> He himself shared more information about his visit on Twitter.

*"I will have substantive conversations with Prime Minister Nikolay Denkov, I will meet with President Rumen Radev, government officials, MPs, politicians and journalists,"* Zelenskyy wrote in the social network. He listed the defense support, Euro-Atlantic integration, the upcoming NATO summit, security guarantees and the implementation of the peace formula as top priorities of the conversations with Bulgarian officials.<sup>4</sup>

The Council of Ministers of Bulgaria announced that Ukrainian President will meet with Prime Minister Nikolay Denkov, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Maria Gabriel and the leaders of the parliamentary groups that submitted the declaration in support of Ukraine's membership in NATO. It was also announced that a discussion with ambassadors, politicians and representatives of civil society was also planned.<sup>5</sup>

First, President Zelenskyy met with Prime Minister Nikolay Denkov and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Maria Gabriel. They mainly talked about defense and security related topics.

President Zelenskyy and Prime Minister Denkov signed a bilateral political declaration on the Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine as soon as conditions allow it. *"We know from our own experience the transformative power of membership in strong organizations such as the European Union and NATO. The enlargement process must move at a pace with the reform process in the candidate country,"* Bulgaria's Prime Minister said as he promised support to prepare Ukraine for its accession to the EU and the alliance.<sup>6</sup>

Nikolay Denkov expressed his and the Bulgarian government's solidarity with Ukraine's struggle against the military aggression of the Russian Federation. *"Bulgaria offers consistent support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity as we are convinced that an independent and sovereign Ukraine is a key for Euro-Atlantic security,"* the Prime Minister underscored. *"Bulgaria cannot gaze indifferently at the suffering of millions of people just a few hundred kilometers away from our borders,"* he said further.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, Bulgarian National Assembly voted a declaration with the same commitment. It came amid an expected summit of the alliance in Vilnius, at which Kiev was counting on receiving an invitation to join.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.vesti.bg/bulgaria/zelenski-s-pyrvi-dumi-za-poseshtenieto-v-bylgarii-a-6172391>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dw.com/bg/zelenski-pristigna-v-blgaria-s-kogo-se-se-sresne/a-66134578>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dw.com/bg/zelenski-pristigna-v-blgaria-s-kogo-se-se-sresne/a-66134578>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.bg/en/Press-center/News/President-Zelenskyy-thanks-Bulgaria-for-its-support-for-Ukraine>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.bg/en/Press-center/News/President-Zelenskyy-thanks-Bulgaria-for-its-support-for-Ukraine>

With 157 votes in favour and 57 against, Bulgarian Parliament backed Ukraine's membership in NATO after the restoration of peace on its territory.

“In favour” were the MPs from GERB-UDF, “We continue the change-Democratic Bulgaria” (PP-DB), MRF and “There Is Such A People”, who are also submitters of the declaration. Against were the MPs from Revival and BSP for Bulgaria.

The 49th National Assembly declared that the most direct and desirable way to restore peace in Ukraine, the Black Sea region and Europe is the complete and immediate voluntary withdrawal of the Russian Federation beyond the internationally recognized borders of all sovereign states affected by it.<sup>8</sup>

In order to guarantee Ukraine's ability to defend itself from the aggressor on its territory, the National Assembly insisted that the institutions in Bulgaria continue to provide it with political, financial, humanitarian, military, military-technical support until the full restoration of its sovereignty within the internationally recognized borders.<sup>9</sup>

The text of the declaration also states that Parliament supports the start of the planning process and the adoption of specific parameters and time-frame for Ukraine's accession to NATO, the deepening of the Alliance's political and practical support to it and the expansion of strategic relations.<sup>10</sup>

Bulgarian National Assembly called on the allies to use the Vilnius Summit to outline clear parameters along the path of Ukraine's NATO membership.<sup>11</sup>

During a joint press conference of Zelenskyy and Denkov, the Ukrainian president expressed gratitude to Bulgaria and called it a "defender of freedom". *"In this moral crisis in Europe, Bulgaria is a defender of freedom, an opponent of the policy of genocide that Russia is leading against our country, our independence, against our freedom and our people...Ukraine will never forget that in such a difficult moment for us you are with us. I appreciate that very much. Thank you very much!"* Zelenskyy said.<sup>12</sup>

Bulgaria and Ukraine agreed to intensify their cooperation in the defense sector. The two leaders discussed the next package of military aid for the Ukrainian army.

Bulgaria will also continue to support Ukraine in several other areas: healthcare, education, environment and energy. *"We will continue our discussion about the medical*

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<https://dv.parliament.bg/DVWeb/showMaterialDV.jsp;jsessionid=76537DAC4BF2769587B23B1DF3EB2A49?idMat=197059>; The full text of the declaration could be seen here: <https://www.parliament.bg/en/news/ID/5736>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.parliament.bg/en/news/ID/5736>

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/zelenski-poseshtenie-bulgaria/32491676.html>

*treatment of Ukrainian soldiers in Bulgaria and the training of Ukrainian medics in Bulgaria,”* President Zelenskyy said.<sup>13</sup>

Bulgaria also pledged to contribute to the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine with expertise and resources for the energy and transport infrastructure. Bulgarian companies are capable to help in the restoration and conservation of damaged cultural monuments in Ukraine.<sup>14</sup>

Again on the same day, the energy ministers of the two countries signed Memorandum of Understanding for energy cooperation. The signed MoU expressed the willingness of the two governments to exchange scientific, technological, engineering and operational experience in the more efficient use of renewable energy sources and new energy technologies.<sup>15</sup>

A few hours before that, the Bulgarian Parliament instructed the Minister of Energy to hold negotiations with the Minister of Energy of Ukraine in order to sell the equipment intended for the Belene NPP project.

An important point of Zelenskyy's visit to Sofia was his meeting with the President of Bulgaria Rumen Radev.

Bulgarian president expressed the country's support for Ukraine, but again reiterated his position that he does not support providing Bulgarian armaments.

In response to these words, Zelenskyy asked provocatively: *"If you are in my place, and if you are not helped with weapons by people who share common values with you, what will you do?"*

Rumen Radev highlighted Bulgaria's support for Ukraine and the fact that the country has sheltered thousands of Ukrainian refugees.

*"I want to express our solidarity with the people of Ukraine and with the victims of this cruel war, which is still raging at the moment. On the very first day, I denounced the aggression against your country. In the first months, Bulgaria reached out to thousands of citizens of Ukraine and many of them continue to be under the protection of the Bulgarian state"* Radev said.<sup>16</sup>

During the conversation, Radev called the war a *"conflict"* that should be resolved *"diplomatically"*.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.bg/en/Press-center/News/President-Zelenskyy-thanks-Bulgaria-for-its-support-for-Ukraine>

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gov.bg/en/Press-center/News/President-Zelenskyy-thanks-Bulgaria-for-its-support-for-Ukraine>

<sup>16</sup> <https://bntnews.bg/news/radev-ne-podkrepyam-balgarsko-orazhie-za-ukraina-zelenski-ako-ste-na-moe-myasto-kakvo-shte-pravite-1239859news.html>

In response, the president of Ukraine stated that what is happening in his country is not a conflict, but a war, and added that balance, diplomacy and support for Russia cannot be sought because it wants to destroy NATO and the EU.

Later, during a discussion with the participation of Prime Minister Denkov, Deputy Prime Minister Maria Gabriel and representatives of civil organizations, Zelenskyy said that he would not criticize Radev, as he respect Bulgaria.

According to Zelenskyy, they are in full agreement with the Bulgarian president on all aspects, including energy and the peace formula, except for the issue of providing military aid.<sup>17</sup>

Later in the day, Prime Minister Nikolai Denkov and Deputy Prime Minister Mariya Gabriel hosted a discussion attended by President Zelenskyy, ambassadors, politicians, volunteers and civil society activists.

Traditionally, Ukrainian President delivers speeches before the parliaments of the countries he visits. In Bulgaria, however, this tradition is being broken and this format was replacing it.

President Zelensky explained why he came in Bulgaria - because of shortages of weapons and electricity.<sup>18</sup>

## **Conclusion**

On July 6, President Volodymyr Zelensky visited Bulgaria for the first time and succeeded to conclude several important agreements with the Bulgarian government. They envisage mostly strengthening cooperation in the field of defense and energy. Bulgaria has reaffirmed its commitment to providing military aid to Kiev, as well as its support for Ukraine in the process of joining the European Union (EU) and NATO after the war ends.

This visit caused a great interest in Bulgarian media and society. According to the dominant part of the media coverage, this visit was recognition that Bulgaria is part of the democratic world that supports Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression. In this way, Bulgaria has received a chance to once again declare firm support for Ukraine.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/32492039.html>

<sup>18</sup> <https://bntnews.bg/news/vizitata-na-zelenski-v-balgariya-s-kogo-govori-i-kakvo-kaza-obobshtenie-1239877news.html>