

Romania (România) and Bulgaria

Romania and Bulgaria are neighbouring states in south-eastern Europe. Bulgaria has borders with Greece, Turkey, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Romania borders Moldova, Ukraine and Hungary. Both nations also border Serbia and the Black Sea. Until 1989, they were both under communist rule and were members of the Warsaw Pact group, aligned with the USSR. Having become democratic states, they became members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in 2004 and, on 1 January 2007, became the latest states to join the European Union.

Recent History

Communist rule in Romania ended on Christmas Day 1989 with the execution of dictator Nicolae Ceauşescu. Earlier in the same year, Bulgaria's Communist leader, Todor Zhivkov left office. The events triggered the beginnings of democratic reform and in 1991 both countries adopted new constitutions establishing democratic structures and a market economy. Romania changed its constitution again in 2003 in order to bring its law in line with EU standards.

Nonetheless, both countries suffered from a slow pace of economic reform and continued political corruption in the aftermath of communism. Bulgaria in particular had severe economic difficulties during the 1990s, which saw 600,000 Bulgarians, many of them qualified professionals, leave the country. However, after applying for EU membership in 1995, it gradually stabilised, particularly between 2001-05, under the leadership of former Tsar Simeon II, Simeon Saksobuggotski. By 2005, the EU was satisfied that both Romania and Bulgaria had embraced sufficient reform for their *Accession Treaties* to be ratified. Both countries became full members of the EU on 1 January 2007.

Government Structure

Romania and Bulgaria are both semi-presidential republics. In both countries, executive powers are shared between the President and the Government, which is headed by the Prime Minister. The Presidents of Romania and Bulgaria are directly elected and serve as the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. However, they cannot initiate legislation, only return laws proposed by Parliament for reconsideration. In Bulgaria, the Parliament is unicameral and consists of 240 deputies, elected every four years. In Romania there are two chambers – the Senate, which has 137 members, and the Chamber of Deputies, which has 332 members.

The current Bulgarian President-elect is Rosen Plevneliev, who was elected in October 2011. He will take office in January 2012. The Prime Minister is Boiko Borissov, leader of the Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria party (GERB), which won the 2009 general election.

Romania faced political turmoil in 2007 when President Traian Băsescu was accused of 'violating the constitution', but Romanians voted against impeaching him at a referendum in May 2007. Băsescu was re-elected in 2009 following a close Presidential election. The current Romanian Prime Minister is Emil Boc. His Government lost a vote of no confidence in November 2009, but was re-approved by parliament on 23 December 2009. He leads a coalition government of the Democratic Liberals and Social

Democrats originally formed after the parliamentary elections in November 2008.

Issues concerning EU membership

When the Commission reached its final decision to admit Romania and Bulgaria into the EU, it was tempered by concern that the countries had not completed necessary reforms. In fact, the Commission has threatened to impose penalties unless both governments continue necessary reforms to their justice systems, taxation and agriculture. These include the possibility of withholding €41 billion in development funds earmarked for the two countries until 2013. High-level corruption is also an issue of concern, exemplified by the 2007 debacle in Romania between President Tarieanu and PM Băsescu. In May 2008, EU representatives examined the judicial systems of the two countries and as a result it suspended millions of euros worth of funding to Bulgaria until it reduces its level of corruption. Romania's Labour Minister was sacked for bribery in September 2008.

Both countries tend to blame their continued problems on the legacy of communist-era governments and the disruption caused by the Balkan Wars of the 1990s. For example, in March 2009, Romania's President, Traian Băsescu, said that the country's 'huge bureaucracy' stopped EU funds from being used effectively. The EU's main concern is that a failure to address shortcomings on the part of Bulgaria or Romania will undermine the values that the EU itself is supposed to stand for.

Facts and Figures

- Bulgaria's population fell by 0.78% in 2010.
- 18.5% of the Romanian population was estimated to be living below the poverty line in 2007.
- Economic growth in both Romanian and Bulgarian averaged between 4-5% for 2000-07. However, having been hit hard by the global economic crisis, Romania's growth rate was -1.3% in 2010, and Bulgaria's was 0.2% (although this is up from -7% for Romania and -5% for Bulgaria in 2009).

Quotes

'The target is not simply to get in but to create a Romania that resembles Germany or France or the UK. We can't stop here.'
Mihai Razvan Ungu-Reanu, Romanian Foreign Minister, 2006

Technical Terms

Accession Treaty: treaty endorsing final membership of the European Union. It does not come into force on the day it is signed but on a pre-arranged date.

Copenhagen Criteria: standards that must be met before a country can join the EU, as set down at the Copenhagen European Council in 1993.

Links

- <http://www.government.bg/fce/index.shtml?p=0023&s=001>
- <http://www.gov.ro/main/index/1/2/>
- <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ro.html>
- http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1059735.stm