



# BULGARIA

## NATO member



since 2004

## Defence share in GDP

2018

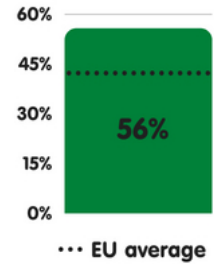


## PESCO projects

Participant



## Trust in EU



### What does the country fear?

Bulgaria is one of seven EU countries that perceive uncontrolled migration as the most significant threat to national security (the others are Italy, Greece, Malta, Slovenia, Hungary, and Austria). Bulgaria fears not just an inability to control the number or type of people who migrate to Europe but also, given the country's declining population, the possible impact of migration on community cohesion. Other significant perceived national security threats include state collapse or civil war in Europe's neighbourhood (a fear stemming from Bulgaria's location on its southern border) as well as external meddling in domestic politics. Confident in its EU and NATO membership, Bulgaria sees little threat of military attacks on its territory. The country also perceives hybrid warfare and cyber attacks as rising threats.

### Who does the country fear?

Bulgaria's threat perceptions centre on no single country or actor. This is largely due to the fundamental divide in views on security in Bulgarian politics. Although Bulgarian parties have largely held to a consensus on the importance of EU and NATO membership since the late 1990s, only the larger party in the ruling coalition is pro-EU and pro-US; its smaller coalition partner is strongly pro-Russian and sceptical of both NATO and the European Union. All parliamentary opposition parties (as well as the president) are pro-Russian to varying degrees. Unsurprisingly, there is usually no direct reference to Russia in Bulgaria's national security papers. Similarly, there are rarely any references to Turkey in these papers, as Bulgarians view the country as both a NATO partner and, increasingly, as a security threat. In this context, Bulgaria identifies jihadists as the most significant threatening actor it confronts.

### Essential security partners

Bulgaria's most important European security partners are other NATO members, particularly Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. Bulgaria also engages in extensive cooperation with neighbouring Greece, especially on Balkans issues. Yet the United States remains Bulgaria's most important security partner by far. Bulgarians view the US nuclear guarantee as essential to their security. There are four joint military facilities (US bases) in Bulgaria, with Sofia and Washington having agreed that the US can station up to 2,500 soldiers in the country. Bulgarians see technical military and intelligence cooperation with the US as very important. Based on an official defence ministry document, Bulgaria envisages a gradual increase in defence spending in the coming years – from 1.55% of GDP in 2018 to 2% of GDP in 2024.

### The EU as a security actor

Regarding NATO as the cornerstone of its security, Bulgaria focuses on maintaining strong transatlantic ties. However, the country also participates in PESCO, while its main political parties – including those that are pro-Russian – largely support EU security and defence cooperation. In Bulgaria, the main driver of support for PESCO is a desire to avoid a multi-speed Europe and to move as close as possible to the EU core. Virtually no Bulgarians oppose PESCO. Still, some are concerned that European defence industry cooperation could harm Bulgaria's small companies. It is one of four EU members to express such a concern (the others are the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Sweden).