

ILIJANA YOTOVA

Iliana Iotova is President of the Republic of Bulgaria, a position she assumed in January 2026 after the resignation of President Rumen Radev. She previously served as Vice President of Bulgaria from 2017 to 2026. With her appointment, she became the first woman president in the country's history.

Before assuming the vice presidency, she was a Member of the European Parliament from 2007 to 2017, representing the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats. During her time in the European Parliament, she worked on issues related to civil liberties, internal market policy, and regional cooperation in the Black Sea region.

Earlier in her political career she served as a Member of the Bulgarian National Assembly and headed the press office of the Bulgarian Socialist Party.

Before entering politics, she worked as a journalist at the Bulgarian National Television. She graduated in Bulgarian Philology with a second specialization in French from Sofia University.



SONJA MIEKLEY

Sonja Miekley is General Manager of the German-Bulgarian Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Sofia, a position she has held since February 2024. In this role she works to strengthen German-Bulgarian economic relations and support bilateral investment and business partnerships.

Before moving to Bulgaria, she served from 2019 to 2024 at the German-Arab Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Cairo as Co-CEO and Regional Spokesperson for the network of German Chambers Abroad in North Africa and the Middle East.

Earlier she worked at the German-Tunisian Chamber of Industry and Commerce and held positions at Bayern International and Baden-Württemberg International. She studied political science, international relations, and economics in Germany.



ZLATOZARA STOILOVA

Zlatozara Stoilova is a Project Manager at the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Bulgaria and Project Coordinator of the Burgas Connectivity Forum. Born in Varna on 8 April 1991, she holds a Master's degree in Marketing Management from ESADE Business School and completed a specialization in International Negotiation and Business Communication at the University of Vienna. She also earned a diploma through the Global Advancement Programme – Business and Finance at the United Nations Youth and Students Association of Austria (AFA).



Her professional experience spans Austria, Bulgaria, Spain, and Belgium, with a focus on project management, international cooperation and sales. She has volunteered with Associació 50a50 in Barcelona and contributed to the “Termómetro Violeta” initiative promoting gender equality.

At the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, she leads projects dedicated to female empowerment in politics and diplomacy. Her interests include EU programmes, international cooperation, local governance, and connectivity in Southeast Europe.

IRENE PLANK

Irene Maria Plank is Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Republic of Bulgaria, a position she has held since January 2023. A career diplomat, she previously served as Special Representative for Strategic Communications at the German Federal Foreign Office in Berlin from 2020 to 2022. Earlier she headed the Division for Economy and Human Rights and was Deputy Head of the Division for Humanitarian Assistance.



From 2012 to 2016 she served at NATO Headquarters in Brussels as Deputy Head of the Private Office of the Secretary General, following an earlier posting to Germany's Permanent Representation to NATO.

Her diplomatic career also includes assignments as Deputy Head of Mission at the German Embassy in Beirut, postings in Kinshasa and Rabat, and service at the Consulate General in Seattle, as well as work on international stabilization and police-building missions in Afghanistan.

She joined the German diplomatic service in 1989 and holds a law degree. Her professional work focuses on international security, humanitarian affairs, transatlantic relations, and democratic governance.

OLESYA ILASHCHUK

Olesya Ilashchuk is Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the Republic of Bulgaria, appointed by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in December 2022 and accredited in Sofia in April 2023. In this role, she works to strengthen bilateral relations and coordinate international support for Ukraine, including cooperation on humanitarian, economic, and security issues.



Prior to her diplomatic appointment, she worked in the private sector and was engaged in professional practice related to psychological counselling and public engagement.

She graduated from Chernivtsi University in 2005 with a degree in history, political science, and international relations, specializing in geography. Her professional interests include international dialogue, humanitarian cooperation, and the development of partnerships between Ukraine and European countries.

ESTEFANA MELENDEZ

Estefanía Meléndez is Associate Fellow at the Center for the Study of Democracy, where she contributes to research and policy analysis on international security, governance, and foreign influence. She also serves as Special Advisor at the Center for Strategic Communications of the Government of Ukraine.



A career diplomat, she previously represented Venezuela as Ambassador to Bulgaria between 2019 and 2022, with concurrent accreditation to North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania. Her appointment followed earlier engagement as a Venezuelan opposition activist in Bulgaria during the country's political crisis.

Earlier in her career she worked in the private sector in Bulgaria, including team leadership and financial services roles, and as an accountant in Venezuela. She holds a degree in Public Accounting from Universidad Católica Andrés Bello.

Her work focuses on the analysis of geopolitical influence, corruption and sanctions-evasion networks, and the development of instruments for conflict resolution and democratic resilience, with particular attention to the role of women in mediation and public life.

DIMANA SLAVOVA

Dimana Slavova holds the rank of Captain II Rank in the Bulgarian Navy and serves as Head of the Administrative Department at the Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy in Varna. Promoted in 2021 by order of the Minister of Defence, she became the first woman in Bulgaria to reach this senior naval officer rank.

Her professional career has been dedicated to military administration, personnel management, and the development of institutional capacity within the Bulgarian Navy's educational structures. She has held several leadership positions at the Naval Academy, including company commander and head of personnel units.

Slavova holds degrees from the Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy in Varna and the Rakovski National Defence College in Sofia, specializing in the organization and management of military formations and naval engineering. She is actively engaged in initiatives supporting leadership development and the integration of women in the armed forces.



ELIZA BAKARDZIEVA

Eliza Bakardzhieva is Senior Director Aircraft Material Management and Logistics at Lufthansa Technik, where she leads a global unit responsible for logistics strategy, supply chain management, and procurement operations across multiple international locations.

She assumed this position in 2022 after serving as Head of Procurement and Supply Management from 2019 to 2022 and holding several successive leadership roles within the company since 2014, including Supplier and Contract Management Lead and Team Leader Purchasing and Planning.

Prior to joining Lufthansa Technik, she worked in the commercial division of Aurubis between 2008 and 2014, focusing on international business operations, budgeting, and risk management.

Her professional expertise lies in global supply chains, strategic procurement, aviation logistics, and organizational transformation.



EMANUELA MANOLOVA

Emanuela Manolova is Associate Professor of Civil Engineering at the European Polytechnic University and Business Development Manager at Aurubis Bulgaria, where she works on the development of sustainable construction materials and industrial applications of iron silicate.

Her work combines academic research with industrial innovation, focusing on circular economy solutions and the use of industrial by-products in construction technologies.

Manolova holds a PhD in construction materials from the University of Artois in France and has published research on sustainable concrete technologies and building materials.

In 2018 she received the national **“Young Engineer of the Year”** award from the Federation of Scientific and Technical Unions in Bulgaria in recognition of her achievements in engineering and innovation.



MARIA TCHAKAROVA

Maria Tchakarova is Project Manager at the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Bulgaria, where she has overseen projects in political communication and German-Bulgarian cooperation. In 2025 she founded the NGO “Likat na Sofia which uses artificial intelligence to create interactive projects that bring the history of Sofia to life.

She previously served as Scientific Associate at the foundation from 2019 to 2024, coordinating research activities, policy events, and international delegations.

Earlier in her career she worked with Lidl Bulgaria and completed the International Parliamentary Scholarship programme of the German Bundestag. She also held positions with the Municipality of Regensburg and the University of Regensburg, focusing on social integration, research, and academic cooperation, and completed internships at the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Embassy of Bulgaria in Germany.

She holds a Master of Business Administration and a Bachelor’s degree in Political Science from the University of Regensburg and is certified in project management methodologies.



ELIZAVETA KARAMIHAILOVA (1893-1968)

Elizaveta Karamihailova was a pioneering Bulgarian physicist and the first woman nuclear physicist in Bulgaria, as well as the first female habilitated lecturer at Sofia University. Her work played a key role in the development of atomic physics research in the country.

She earned a doctorate in physics and mathematics from the University of Vienna in 1922 and began research at the Radium Institute under Karl Przibram, later specializing at the Cavendish Laboratory of the University of Cambridge, where she collaborated with leading physicists including Nobel laureate George Paget Thomson.

In 1939 she began lecturing in experimental atomic physics at Sofia University, becoming the first woman to hold such an academic position in Bulgaria. She later helped establish the Department of Atomic Physics and founded the Laboratory of Radioactivity at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Her research focused on radioactivity, cosmic rays, and the radioactivity of mineral springs, contributing to the early development of nuclear and atomic physics in Bulgaria and strengthening scientific links with major European research centres.



DESI SLAVA IVANOVIC

Desislava Ivanovic is Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Schwarz IT Bulgaria and Head of Department, where she leads strategic technology development and enterprise software solutions within the Schwarz Group.

She previously served as SAP Solution Development Team Lead from 2020 to 2023. Between 2017 and 2020 she worked at Kaufland Service as SAP Development Manager.

Earlier in her career she spent nearly a decade at SAP Labs Bulgaria, progressing from Senior ABAP Developer to Technical Lead and managing complex software engineering projects and international support operations. She has more than twenty years of experience in enterprise software development and IT leadership, with a focus on large-scale SAP environments and digital transformation.

She holds a Master's degree in Applied Mathematics from the Technical University of Sofia and graduated from the Sofia High School of Mathematics and Computer Science. Her professional expertise includes enterprise software architecture, large-scale IT systems, and technology management.



RADOSTINA KONDAKOVA

Radostina Kondakova is Principal Security Engineer at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, a position she has held since September 2025. In this role she works on strengthening cybersecurity frameworks and supporting the digital resilience of international financial operations.

Alongside this position, she has built her career at Scalefocus, where she has served as Head of the Security Business Line since 2021, leading expert teams and developing cybersecurity services for international clients. Earlier she was Manager of the Cyber Security Team and Cybersecurity Engineer at the company.

Earlier in her career she worked at Upnetix and DevriX in software development, automation testing, and security engineering roles.

She is an active contributor to the cybersecurity community, participating in industry conferences and speaking at events such as OWASP Sofia and ISTA Conference. Her professional interests include cybersecurity governance, secure digital transformation, and the development of resilient security solutions for complex organizations.



YANA NEYKOVA

Yana Neykova is a Product and Project Manager at the Data Science Society specializing in the development of digital products in artificial intelligence, fintech, and e-commerce. Her work focuses on product strategy, business development, and the implementation of AI-based and data-driven solutions.

She has held product management roles at PayRetailers, SoftServe, ISI Emerging Markets Group, Codix, and OnProcess Technology, working on product development, platform integrations, and business analysis. Earlier in her career she gained experience in international operations and supply chain processes at Ericsson.

Since 2019 she has been actively involved with the Data Science Society as a volunteer Project Manager and Mentor, supporting educational initiatives and young professionals in the technology sector.

She holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics and a Master's degree in Accounting from the University of National and World Economy in Sofia and has pursued further studies in Computer Science.



ZORKA IVANOVA

Zorka Ivanova is Chief Financial Officer of Siemens Energy EOOD and Financial Director of Siemens Energy Serbia, where she is responsible for financial strategy, business planning, and financial governance across the company's regional operations.

She has built her career within Siemens and Siemens Energy for more than fifteen years, progressing through a series of senior finance roles including Country Finance Lead and Country Division Controller. Her work has focused on financial management, commercial project oversight, and risk and compliance in large-scale energy and infrastructure projects.

Earlier in her career she worked as a Business Administration Specialist in the energy sector at Siemens and gained initial professional experience in the banking sector.

She holds a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Finance from the University of National and World Economy in Sofia. Her expertise includes financial strategy, corporate governance, and managing complex financial operations in the energy industry.



OLGA VASILEVSKA

Olga Vasilevska is a Bulgarian entrepreneur and managing director of MW Logistica, a family-owned freight forwarding and logistics company with international operations. She represents the third generation of a family business and assumed leadership of the company in her mid-twenties.

Under her leadership, the company has expanded its international logistics activities and transport networks across Europe. Her professional work focuses on supply chain development, transport services, and innovative logistics solutions.

Alongside her business career, she is the creator and host of the podcast "Nov Chovek" ("New Person"), a platform dedicated to personal development and conversations with inspiring public figures.

Vasilevska has been recognized among Bulgaria's **Forbes "30 Under 30"** and **"40 under 40"** young leaders. She also serves on the boards of several business organizations, including the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the German-Bulgarian Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

