NATO 'EXTREMELY IMPORTANT' TO BULGARIA

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NATO is of extreme importance to Bulgaria and Sofia backs all defense and deterrence effort of the alliance, President Rumen Radev has said.

Radev has made the remark during a visit to the NATO headquarter in Brussels, on the second day of his first foreign trip as head of state.

"NATO remains an extremely important organisation to safeguard the allies ... we support NATO efforts to defend and deter and we believe that Bulgaria is part of these efforts," he has noted.

He has added Bulgaria is part of the "serious adaptation" of NATO over the past three years. "This process will continue as this required by the international environment at the moment."

Meeting NATO Secratary General Jens Stoltenberg, he has asserted that Bulgaria will work toward boosting military expenditure to 2%, in line with NATO commitments, according to the news website Dnevnik.bg

Radev has also cited his US counterpart Donald Trump's view that international terrorism and the fight against Islamic State in particular generate the main threats.

Stoltenberg is quoted by the BNR as praising Radev's contribution to the airspace protection at the time he has Commander of the Bulgarian Air Force.

He has also thanked Radev for Bulgaria's commitment to maintaining a present in Afghanistan.

Stoltenberg, while underlining that Russia's increased activity in Europe is changing the security environment, the Alliance remains "open to political dialogue" with Russia.

Radev for his part has noted defensive and deterring potential should go hand in hand with deepening dialogue with Russia in order to "avoid confrontation" and "mitigate the risk".

But AFP also quotes Stoltenberg as saying "The message of the new administration is that they also [like NATO] want dialogue with Russia but from a position of strength."

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