
AT EU SUMMIT, BORISSOV DEPLORES 'TERRIBLE' RUSSIAN CYBERATTACKS ON BULGARIA

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Speaking to the Bulgarian press ahead of the two-day EU summit, Borissov was asked about the risk of a hard Brexit. In asking the question, the journalist reminded that Borissov was the first leader of a EU country to speak openly about such a scenario almost one year ago.

The Bulgarian Prime Minister answered:

Lets avoid such a scenario. Being a prophet for bad news is not always a merit. Then he said that the consequences of a hard Brexit would be devastating for Europes finances and economy, before focusing on his favourite theme - security.

Proliferation [he didnt mention chemical weapons], terrorism, human trafficking, trafficking of ancient artefacts if you will, smuggling, drugs □ the British services are among the very best in the world, Borissov said

So I promised Theresa May that nothing should change in terms of coordination with the European and the British services.

No way to be prepared for hard Brexit

A journalist asked how if he would comment on Council President Donald Tusks statement that EU countries should be prepared for a hard Brexit. He replied:

There is no way to be prepared. This is the bad scenario. It will be like the financial [the Eurozone crisis]. You saw, the US were preparing for hurricane Michael, but hundreds are unaccounted for.

Asked what would happen if this summit would produce no result, he answered:

There will be another summit. There are already dates, in November.

Indeed, mid-November has been earmarked for another Brexit summit. But EU officials said hours later that not enough progress has been made in the divorce talks to call a November summit to draft a deal.

Asked about the EPP pre-summit meeting and what decisions were taken for possibly expelling Viktor Orbáns Fidesz party, Borissov stressed that he had strongly supported his colleague, adding that he was in disagreement with him on issues such as the Central European University (CEU), but that he was making reproaches to him directly.

The Bulgarian government has recently decided to take Orbán's side against the possible Article 7 procedure requested for by the European Parliament.

Borissov further praised Orbán for being the only one who warned about the migration threat, adding that at the same time, Bulgaria was putting in place defences which everyone now considered as an example of how to solve a migration crisis.

Borissov also said that his GERB party was one of the strongest forces in EPP.

Asked if he would support Manfred Weber as EPP Spitzenkandidat, he said this would decide at the EPP congress in Helsinki on 7-8 November. He said that Weber, and basically everyone in EPP had apologised to him for having reacted to the murder of journalist Viktoria Marinova as if she was killed because of her work.

In reality, the ongoing investigation appears to confirm that her murder was of purely criminal nature.

EURACTIV asked Borissov if Bulgaria would expel Russian diplomats.

Earlier on Wednesday, Tsvetan Tsvetanov, who is the number two in the GERB party and has served as interior minister, said Bulgaria was likely to expel Russian diplomats, because in his words the proofs of Russian involvement in the Skripal case were much clearer now.

Up to now, Bulgaria is one of the few EU members who didn't expel Russian diplomats in relation with the alleged Russian covert operation in the UK.

Unplug machines from the sockets

Borissov made no reference to the Skripal case, but said that cyberattacks and similar actions in Bulgaria had been recently exposed, with the help of allied services.

You remember, in the Council of Ministers, and in other ministries, before the start of the Bulgarian Presidency [first half of 2018], the cyberattacks were terrible. I don't remember the date, but it was a Friday, I asked [my staff] to unplug the machines from the sockets, to minimise damage.

Actually such cyberattacks have never been publicly announced. The only time when officials said cyberattacks took place is during the 25 October 2015 local elections, which happened alongside a referendum for introducing remote voting.

Reportedly, the computer systems of four of the most important state institutions were targeted.

Former Bulgarian President Rossen Plevneliev said in a TV interview on Saturday that this referendum was targeted by Russia, because in his words it could have completely changed the political system in Bulgaria.

Plevneliev explained that the referendum, which remained invalid, due to low turnout, could have given the chance for two million Bulgarian voters living permanently abroad, whom he described as pro-West, to turn upside-down the results in national elections.

Borissov stressed that his country's loyalty to the Western alliance was beyond doubt, adding that his country also strives to have pragmatic and mutually beneficial relations with Russia,

mentioning spheres such as gas, tourism, trade.

He refrained from disclosing if Russian diplomats would be expelled, saying:

Tsvetanov has always been more of a hardliner in this type of appeals, but the decisions will be taken by the government. The issue [of whether to expel Russian diplomats] is not on the agenda, but I repeat, with all the energy we follow up on every signal on all these issues.

I have never blamed anyone before having proof. But the fact is that there are entries into Bulgaria by people under surveillance by the Euro-Atlantic services.

Last March Borissov said he wasn't sure Moscow was behind the Salisbury poisoning case. EURACTIV asked Borissov if he was still of the same opinion. He said:

Im not going to return to this issue.

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/at-eu-summit-borissov-deplores-terrible-russian-cyberattacks-on-bulgaria/>

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