

Black Sea Energy and Research Centre

In today's episode, we have the pleasure to talk to Angel Nikolaev. Mr. Nikolaev is Manager at the [Black Sea Energy and Research Centre](#) (BSERC). The BSERC acts as a focal point for energy related activities, aimed at developing the co-operation between the Black Sea region countries and the EU in the energy field.

Name: Angel Nikolaev

Education: M.Sc. in Environmental Management and Policy; M.Sc. in Energy Economics and Management

Job Title @ BSERC: BSERC Manager

Languages: Bulgarian, English, Russian

Personal Motto: "Act or accept"

Number of Employees @ BSERC: 10

Can you explain a little bit to our audience what your institution is doing?

BSERC was initially public. It was established in 1995 in Sofia, Bulgaria, by the ministries responsible for energy of 13 countries in the Black Sea region and the European Commission, to support the European neighbourhood policy in the energy field. Until 2006, our activities had mainly regional focus and were dedicated to strengthening of the energy cooperation among the BSR countries, harmonization of the national legislation of BSR countries with EU one, etc.

In 2007, however, when Bulgaria and Romania became EU members, there were no longer funding opportunities for common initiatives in the region and respectively the Governments of the BSR countries became less interested to continue the collaboration.



Credit: Angel Nikolaev

For that reason, BSERC was transformed into an NGO, keeping limited activities in the region and shifting the focus to Bulgaria. Since then, we have developed a number of national and local energy policy documents for the Bulgarian Government and have participated in more than 30 EU-funded projects dealing with either energy-related research or promotion of sustainable energy solutions.

How do you see the development of renewable energies in Bulgaria?

Bulgaria has substantially exceeded its 2020 target for renewables. However, I would not consider it a success story, because a large part of the RES came at a high cost, due to the too generous feed-in premiums for electricity from RES, while another big part came from the massive use of biomass for heating in primitive inefficient polluting individual stoves.

The future RES development is uncertain. The lobbies of nuclear, gas, and coal sectors had very strong influence on the energy

policy during the last decade. The newly elected Bulgarian Government has not yet declared its intentions, but I am optimistic that it will increase the market transparency and the stability of the regulatory framework.



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Where do you see the most potential?

In Bulgaria, solar PV represents by far the highest unused economic potential for electricity generation. It is very likely to be complemented with wind, due to the seasonal balancing of the two sources.

Additionally, I expect serious penetration of heat pumps, especially in the residential sector, where the electricity price

is traditionally quite low. As the Bulgarian population is very sensitive to electricity price, I do not expect substantial increase of the price for households in next years. For example, in December 2021, the Parliament adopted a moratorium on the electricity and heating prices for households, providing price freeze for the next 3 months, despite the decisions of the Regulator.

Finally, one can expect continuation of the ongoing trend of replacement of the inefficient firewood heaters with efficient pellet boilers.

What are you currently working on?

I am working on two very interesting projects. One is dedicated to the energy transition of the most coal intensive Bulgarian region (Stara Zagora). It is difficult to explain to people attached to coal for generations that the end of the coal era is approaching and they need to prepare for the low-carbon future. Despite that, through a number of workshops and presentation of good practices for the transition from other coal regions, a notable change of the mind-set of many local stakeholders can be observed.

The other one is dedicated to the replacement of the old inefficient heating devices in the residential sector with clean and efficient ones based on renewable energy. In collaboration with



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a number of municipalities, technology suppliers, installers, and energy agencies, we are demonstrating the multiple benefits of the advanced RES technologies to the residents. Additionally, we are collaborating with policy makers and financial institutions to provide incentives for the technology replacement.

What challenges do you face?

In the coal region, on which our project focuses, there are stakeholders who strongly oppose the transition – mainly the representatives of the coal sector and the local policy makers. They take an extreme position and usually support it with either one-sided or false arguments. Still, we have not found a way to involve them in a constructive discussion for the future of the region.

However, we are improving ...

In the other initiative that focuses on the replacement of heating technologies in households, the main challenge is to activate the passive municipalities. While some municipal administrations take advantage of all opportunities to improve the life of the

residents, others limit their activities to the bare minimum required by the legislation. It is very difficult to motivate the latter, especially when the results of the next elections are pre-determined.

As public acceptance within the population is always a big issue and factor, how do you see the developments in Bulgaria concerning the realization of renewable energy projects?

Public acceptance has been a major barrier for new RES-based electricity installations since 2012, because in 2010 and 2011, many new installations received high feed-in premiums and this resulted in increase of electricity prices. On the other hand, the ongoing shift from feed-in premiums to market prices is vanishing the negative attitude.

In your experience, are there any peculiarities to pay special attention to when doing energy projects in Bulgaria?

Unfortunately, still some administrative procedures, including for small capacity projects, are heavy, slow, and/or disproportionately expensive. However, I believe that the ongoing discussions about that would improve the situation soon.

What do you want everybody to know about BSERC?

BSERC is a reliable partner, with proven record of accomplishment in many projects that brought change in energy policy and energy market. By keeping close relations with experts from ministries and agencies, municipalities, academia, businesses, NGOs, and freelancers in Bulgaria and other BSR countries, we are able to implement a wide range of multi-disciplinary assignments.

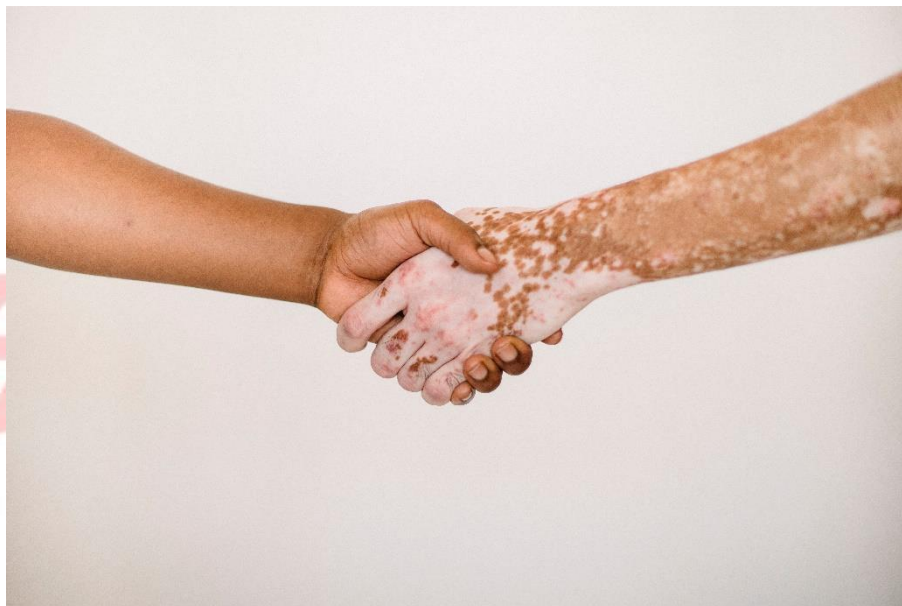


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If we do the interview again in five years, where does BSERC stand then? What is your vision for the future?

The pace of change in the energy sector, especially in Bulgaria, is accelerating in the last years, so even a short 5-year horizon is uncertain. I expect that our work would continue to move from the technical and policy to the social field and we would be working even more on the just transition, energy communities, energy poverty, and change of public acceptance.

Thank you very much for the interview and your time!

If you would like to find out more about the Black Sea Energy Research Centre and its activities please visit <https://www.bserc.eu/>



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