

State-owned Bulgarian Energy Holding (BEH) has replaced the entire leadership of its subsidiary - natural gas supplier Bulgargaz.

Bulgargaz Executive Director Nikolai Pavlov and the other members of the company's Board - Svetoslav Delchev, Diana Boneva, Iliyan Dukov and Nikolai Donchev - were replaced by Lyudmil Yotsov, Anzhela Slavova, Anton Adamov, Ivan Topchiiski and Stefan Voinov.

Minister of Energy Alexander Nikolov said that the shake-up at Bulgargaz follows a probe conducted by BEH, which was launched a few weeks ago, and was also influenced by some additional factors and the current situation created by heating prices in Bulgaria. According to him, the decision was not directly linked to an operation by the State Agency for National Security.

The Minister did not say what the BEH probe found. He noted that BEH needs to make reasonable decisions about the companies in its

system. During the time of the probe, there were many comments about whether it was possible to obtain additional amounts of natural gas from Azerbaijan, and if so, how.

Prime Minister Kiril Petkov indicated that the Bulgargaz case has to do with soaring natural gas prices. He said the price increase has resulted from wrong decisions within the company. He also pointed to missed opportunities, saying that Bulgaria could import gas not only from Russia but also from Azerbaijan. According to him, the gas control and dispatch center at Nea Mesimvria in northern Greece could be used to supply gas to Bulgaria, but, for some reason, Bulgaria failed to do that. Therefore, Bulgaria has given up those amounts of gas for a certain period of time, putting itself in a position to buy only Russian gas at much higher prices. That is how the price of gas went up by 30 %.

A statement from the dismissed members of the board of directors of Bulgargaz, reads that the board considers the decision to replace its

members as politically motivated and in contradiction with the requests made for expert management of state-owned companies. The dismissed management claims that they were not notified in advance and learned the news from the media.

They also do not accept the criticism for the increased gas prices and the smaller quantities of Azeri gas. The former leaders of the company were adamant that these allegations were not based on any objective basis. According to former management, the only reason why the Bulgarian market cannot receive all quantities of natural gas under the agreement with Azerbaijan is the lack of the Bulgarian-Greek gas connection - the IGB gas pipeline from Komotini to Stara Zagora.