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# Sleeping beside a Glock and wads of cash: Questions swirl around bedroom photos of Bulgaria's prime minister

**Borzou Daragahi** reports on leaked images that have emerged amid a growing struggle between Boyko Borisov and a fugitive gambling oligarch



@borzou | 20 hours ago |



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The origin of the images remains murky ( Getty Images )

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### 9mm handgun and a drawer full of €500 bills and gold bars doing on the internet?

The photographs were distributed to news outlets anonymously, published online last week and authenticated as genuine by experts for two investigative news websites. They have rocked the Balkan nation, and raised numerous questions about both Mr Borisov and his enemies.

Questions remain as to why Mr Borisov, a centre-right political leader who is an ally of German chancellor Angela Merkel, appears in these photos to be living like a B-movie gangster, keeping firearms, cash and gold at his bed stand as he sleeps.

One of the investigative news websites which analysed the photographs concluded that some of the photos were taken between 2017 and 2019.

A bigger question is who took the photos and why they were released?

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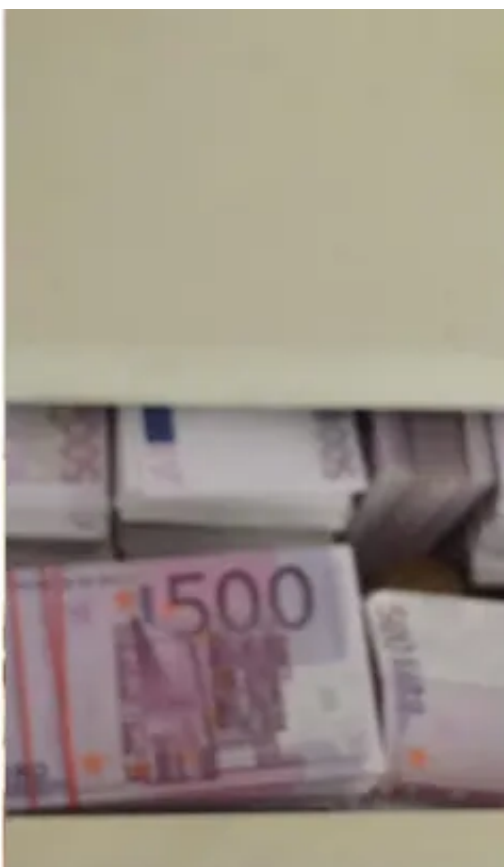


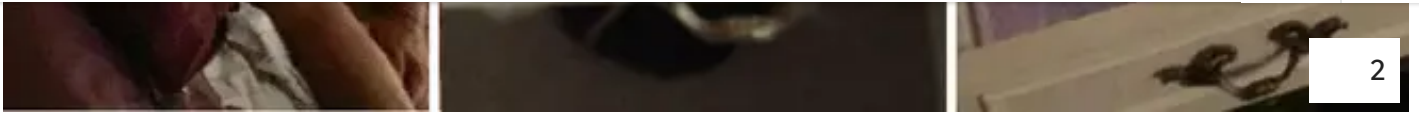
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Mr Borisov has angrily denounced the photos, seeming to authenticate them.

“The goal is to crush us mentally, then physically,” Mr Borisov said in a press conference, before joking: “At least they didn’t photograph me with a little boy in bed.”

Mr Borisov has accused a rival, Rumen Radev, a leader of the opposition Socialist Party, of using a drone to stalk him. Both men reside in villas near each other in a smart section of Sofia.





Mr Radev, a former air force pilot who admits he owns and knows how to operate a drone, has denied the accusation.

But analysts have suggested that Mr Radev is an unlikely culprit. Instead, they suspect that the photos are part of a political and legal war between Mr Borisov and Bulgarian gambling oligarch Vasil Bozhkov, who fled into exile in the United Arab Emirates earlier this year after a falling out with the prime minister.

According to a Sofia insider, Mr Bozhkov, considered the richest man in Bulgaria, had gathered other oligarchs to scheme against the prime minister after his government had insisted on more of a take from the country's various business operations.

"There was a secret meeting of Bozhkov and other oligarchs," the insider said, citing sources close to the country's security apparatus. "They were discussing how to topple Borisov's government."

Mr Borisov reportedly found out about the meeting, prompting him set prosecutors and tax collectors on Mr Bozhkov to pursue him on various financial crimes.

In February, in absentia charges of murder and rape were added to Mr Bozhkov's rap sheet. He was also later charged with theft of antiquities.

But the gambling empire kingpin, who is said to control a fortune worth £1.2bn, has fought back, regularly leaking damaging information about senior Bulgarian officials on his Facebook and Twitter accounts. This month he claimed to have receipts and documents showing he had given Mr Borisov and finance minister Vladislav Gouranav the equivalent of £24m in "political protection" money to maintain his gambling empire.

Mr Borisov has denied the allegations. "If anybody dared take money from [Mr Bozhkov] – I neither know, nor has anybody told me about it," he said in a television interview earlier this month in which he swore "on his life" that the allegations were untrue.

Mr Borisov's government has sought to nationalise Mr Bozhkov's businesses, a move that the oligarch says he will challenge in court.

The prime minister has no shortage of enemies in the country. He has also generated animosity among left-leaning Bulgarians by insisting on bringing the nation into the eurozone, a move some members of the political opposition worry will cause price inflation and hinder Bulgaria's ability to use macroeconomic levers through its central bank.

Mr Borisov, a strapping former firefighter and interior ministry official, is a one-time mayor of Sofia who first became prime minister in 2009 on an anti-corruption platform.



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