In February 2006, ABB Bulgaria EOOD signed a contract with the national electricity supply company of Bulgaria, NEK EAD, for the design, manufacture, delivery, installation, and commissioning of new excitation, medium-voltage switchgear, and control equipment for two hydro-electric power generators at the purchaser’s Vacha II power station. The contract was awarded to ABB as a result of an open tender round against stiff competition from all the big names in power generation and control.

Only eight months later, comfortably ahead of schedule, the station was put back in operation and the customer noticeably pleased.

The Vacha II hydro-electric power station is part of what the customer calls “the Dospat – Vacha Cascade”, a complex multitiered chain of power stations, the purpose of which is to extract a maximum of power from the natural resource the river system is while paying due attention to nature preservation.

Originally, the Vacha II station was commissioned in 1973 with two vertical Francis-turbine/generator sets, each with a generating capacity of 3.5 MW. The station is fed from the Krichim Dam through a pipeline it shares with another station in the cascade.

The project presented ABB Bulgaria with plenty of engineering challenges that stemmed from the overall mission: to integrate Vacha II smoothly into the cascade while maximizing yield, and minimizing the need for human attention. (One aspect of the latter requirement was that the station had to be operable remotely.)

Eight months later, ABB’s project team had the customer’s word that they had succeeded admirably.
ABB’s scope of supply can be divided into the following subsystems:

**New Control System**
The relay-logic control system for the generating sets has been replaced with a new computer-based control system: ABB’s Compact 800 System. This system in turn consists of the following:

- Two aggregate controllers, AC 800M plus accompanying S800 I/O, whose software implementation of the required controls has enabled a far more precise, sophisticated and smooth control of the generating sets than before. These controllers communicate with the relay protection equipment of the generators over Profibus DP field buses, eliminating the need for discrete wiring that would have necessitated far more cabling.

  Each aggregate controller has a color touch panel for local operation.

- One station controller, also AC 800M + S800 I/O, for the handling of shared station functionality.

- One operator workstation, Compact HMI 800, for visualization and human operation of the processes involved.

  All controllers and the operator workstation are interconnected by an optical Ethernet communications network.

**New Excitation System**
The existing electromechanical excitation systems have been replaced by new static thyristor-based systems: ABB’s Unitrol F. The electrical braking function has been implemented neatly in software across the Unitrol-embedded controllers and the aggregate controllers.

  New synchronization units have been installed, based on ABB Synchrotact 4, facilitating precise automatic and manual synchronization of the generators with the electric power grid.

**New Medium-voltage Switchgear**
New 6.3kV MV switchgear has been installed: ABB’s UniGear ZS1, with built-in digital protection as well as remote control and communication functionality. The switchgear has a small footprint, which enabled installation in the available space without alterations to the building.

**New Auxiliary Equipment**
New low-voltage switchgear, ABB’s MNS Light, with withdrawable units, has been installed to cater for the overall
needs of the station, including supply and control of the aggregate governors. A dry MV transformer has also been installed.

All equipment installed is of the latest designs, offering faster synchronization, more accurate load balancing, and more sophisticated (including remote) control.

– This kind of project, involving many different engineering disciplines suits us down to the ground, says Kolyo Stoilov, ABB Bulgaria’s manager of the Vacha II modernization project. “We have a broad palette of electrical and control equipment on offer and we are well stocked with local engineering, installation and support resources. Now, that simplifies life for our customers and enables us to provide next-door support for our installations for as long as our customers need it.”

NEK EAD seem to be of similar mind; for quite some time after completion of the project they ran a press release with the following message on their website (translated excerpt here only):

Due to excellent cooperation between the experts of ABB Bulgaria and NEK EAD, the [Vacha II] modernization project was completed successfully by the end of November 2006, within a record term of 8 months. Vacha II HPP has been commissioned for regular operation, the upgrade promising reliable operation far into the future.

– Success doesn’t just happen, Stoilov points out. “That’s something you have to work at on all levels and in all phases. That’s what we did also in the case of Vacha II and that’s why we were successful.”
For more information please contact:

**ABB AB**  
**Control Systems**  
Västerås, Sweden  
Phone: +46 (0) 21 32 50 00  
Fax: +46 (0) 21 13 78 45  
E-Mail: processautomation@se.abb.com  
www.abb.com/controlsystems

**ABB Inc.**  
**Control Systems**  
Wickliffe, Ohio, USA  
Phone: +1 440 585 8500  
Fax: +1 440 585 8756  
E-Mail: industrialitsolutions@us.abb.com  
www.abb.com/controlsystems

**ABB Industry Pte Ltd**  
**Control Systems**  
Singapore  
Phone: +65 6776 5711  
Fax: +65 6778 0222  
E-Mail: processautomation@sg.abb.com  
www.abb.com/controlsystems

**ABB Automation GmbH**  
**Control Systems**  
Mannheim, Germany  
Phone: +49 1805 26 67 76  
Fax: +49 1805 77 63 29  
E-Mail: marketing.control-products@de.abb.com  
www.abb.de/controlsystems

**ABB**  
**Bulgaria Eood**  
P.O. Box 1059 / Triaditsa Str. 5  
BG-1000 Sofia, Bulgaria  
Phone: +359 2 980 0450  
Fax: +359 2 980 0846  
www.abb.com

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