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Slim Margins, Big Players: How One Bulgarian Lab Holds Its Ground in the Prescription Lens Market



iViLENS has been the first and remains the only producer of prescription ophthalmic lenses in Bulgaria. It has been in operation for 20 years now. In the autumn, the company will launch a line of smart glasses for blind or visually impaired people, developed by its Italian partner Ivision Tech in partnership with an Italian union of the blind. The photo shows the Plovdiv production facilities of iViLENS (Photo by iViLENS via BTA)

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(BTA)

On a quiet side street in the centre of Plovdiv, Bulgaria's second-largest city, a four-storey grey building houses what is the country's only laboratory for the production of prescription (RX) optical lenses. It is no small feat that the company behind it has stayed in business for over

two decades in a sector where profit margins are narrow and large international manufacturers dominate the market, leaving little room for smaller players.

Rosen Topalov, co-founder and CEO of the Plovdiv operation, iViLENS OOD, told BTA there are three reasons the prescription lens production sector in Bulgaria is not too crowded. “You can’t get rich in this business, plus big companies make it very hard for small businesses to survive, and lastly, one needs to invest all the time in equipment and technology to keep up,” he said.

iViLENS is a Bulgarian-Italian company established in 1993. It specializes in the production of custom-made ophthalmic lenses. It is 60% owned by Italian firm iVision Tech SpA, and operates out of the 2,000-square-metre facility staffed by approximately 40 specialized operators.

Highly qualified operators

About a third of the staff are qualified opticians or optical technicians, and the coating lab employs chemistry and physics specialists. The rest of the staff have a background in economics, engineering and even linguistics, and the company trains them in-house.

iViLENS serves both the domestic and regional markets. It holds exclusive distribution rights for Leica ophthalmic lenses in Bulgaria and North Macedonia. The company also exports lenses under its own Hera Lens brand to Greece, Italy, Cyprus and North Macedonia.

The Plovdiv facility produces over 170,000 lenses annually.

iViLENS says it holds 12-15% of the domestic market for ophthalmic lenses (which includes both prescription and stock lenses). The market remains dominated by the large companies which import their prescription lenses.

A growing spectacle lenses market in Bulgaria

The prescription spectacle lens segment is the dominant slice of Bulgaria’s eyewear market, with modest but consistent growth across related categories, according to Statista figures.

They show that in 2025, the revenue of Bulgaria's spectacle lenses market is projected to reach USD 74.06 million, showing an annual growth rate of 1.33%.

In terms of per capita revenue, Bulgaria's spectacle lenses market is expected to generate USD 11.28 in 2025. By 2029, the volume in this segment is expected to rise to 759,500 pieces.

Statista also says that Bulgaria is showing a growing trend towards purchasing high-quality and durable spectacle lenses, as consumers prioritize long-term value over immediate cost savings.

iViLENS said it has no figures to verify this sector-wide statistics.

The Plovdiv operation: past and future

iViLENS began RX production in 2001, when it became the first, and still the only, laboratory in Bulgaria dedicated to manufacturing prescription lenses.

The company has invested in new equipment and technology over the years, launching its first state-of-the-art Free Form production line in 2013, and adding two more lines between 2019 and 2020.

Beyond lens production, iViLENS is the exclusive representative for a number of globally recognized brands for optical frames and sunglasses in Bulgaria.

The company outlines a dual focus for its future development: expanding its offerings on the domestic market with new and customized RX products, and entering international markets with a limited series of restored vintage sunglasses from the mid to late 20th century. These carefully refurbished designer frames feature newly crafted sun lenses with custom tints and coatings, preserving the original aesthetic for collectors and enthusiasts of eyewear with character and history.

... and smart glasses for the visually impaired

The company is also preparing to launch in September or October its first smart glasses for the visually impaired. The iSee model was developed by iViLENS' Italian partner iVision Tech in partnership with the Italian Union of the Blind and Visually Impaired. Using built-in sensors and audio tools, it warns users of obstacles up to 7 m away and over 30 cm above ground level. "These glasses will replace the guide dog but not yet the white cane," said Rosen Topalov.

He plans to hold talks with health officials and hopes to see the government cover part of the price of a pair of iSee glasses. The iVision website sets the price at EUR 679.



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