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The risk of political destabilization in Bulgaria, blocking of reforms and the growing inclination towards Russia are the factors which may help avert harsh critical report of the European Commission for Bulgaria and the long-term suspension of EU-funds, Mediapool announced referring to information from EC high-ranking officials.

The report shall be submitted in July. EC expert mission in Bulgaria has concluded this week with inspections carried out in the Ministry of Interior, the State Agency for National Security, the Ministry of Justice, as well as in the departments responsible for EU funds absorption. The main criticism shall be focused on the unsolved contract killings whose number of 150 was recently questioned by the new Bulgarian Minister of Interior Mihail Mikov when he reduced it to 78. Even if this number is considered reliable, it cannot alter the general conclusion that execution-style killings have reached alarmingly high number compared to their solving and bringing of contractors and perpetrators to court which is insignificantly low.

EC shall select a few demonstrative cases, trace back the proceeds undertaken in relation to them and, on their basis, draw a conclusion on the systematic flaws.

There are things which the EC do not want and cannot tell directly to Bulgaria in this report, EC representatives commented before Mediapool. Lately there have been wide comments in Brussels on the unprecedented situation where the European Union may be at the bottom of possible overthrowing of Member State government. The prognoses are that it can happen in Bulgaria if the EC abides strictly by its criteria for assessment of the so-called country's progress and, as a result of probable negative conclusions, decides to impose harder sanctions like the suspension of EU funds until the end of the year.

The report shall be balanced and influenced by the political context, sources claim. The misgivings are that a negative report and suspension of EU funds may lead to political destabilization in Bulgaria and politicians may use these to persuade people that the EU has to be blamed for all problems which may cause anti-western moods. The moderately critical tone and balanced report will encourage Bulgarian politicians to continue reforms.

The other crucial political argument is related to the delicate tuning of EU-Russia relations. Given the fact that Bulgaria is highly dependent from Russia in energy and political aspect, a slap in the face by Brussels may erase the last remains of pro-western mimicry among the governing elite who shall find in this act argument for further loyalty towards Russia.

Another factor which complicates the situation is the tension over new pipelines and the desperate efforts of Europe to reduce its dependency from Russian energy supplies by launching the Nabuko Project. Bulgaria participates in this project but at the same time is among the trusted partners of Gazprom in the competitive South Stream Project.

All these, and other arguments, will force the EC to make a compromise and "spare" Bulgaria by issuing a

Mediapool: EC will spare Bulgaria to avoid political destabilization

report of compromise.

EC representatives specified that the report shall assess the July 2007-July2008 period although there was an intermediate report in the beginning of the year. The assignment of the new Deputy Prime Minister in charge of EU funds shall be evaluated as a positive step.

The problems with EU funds absorption will be also among the focuses of the report. Special attention will be paid to the State Agency for National Security - in particular, how the establishment of this new super-agency has changed the capability of Bulgarian authorities to cope with organized crime and corruption.