

# Positive Thinking

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*The first general remarks of the Bulgarian authorities on the reports, released by the European Commission on the situation in Bulgaria - regarding the management of EU funds and on the progress in the area of Justice and Home Affairs (under the Mechanism for Cooperation and Verification, approved for Bulgaria and Romania in December 2006).*

*This documents under the form of "bullets" has been distributed by the team of the Foreign Affairs Ministry to the ruling coalition's representatives for facilitating them when commenting the EC reports for the media, the Dnevnik daily reports.*

## **1. General commentaries**

» We are acquainted with the European Commission reports and we highly approve the experts' work for the concrete character of facts and the lucidity of assessments. We are thankful for the efforts and the good cooperation with Bulgarian institutions.

» We express our satisfaction with the fact that the European Commission appreciates the efforts and the good results achieved in the sector of Justice and Home Affairs and the absorption of EU funds through the measures taken by the Government in the last few months- the establishment of State Agency for National Security, the changes which took place in the Ministry of Interior, as well as the appointment of Deputy Prime Minister in charge of the EU funds.

» In view of the exceptionally intensive work on Bulgarian part in the last two months and a half, we can only regret that some of our efforts are not reflected in the report. Nevertheless, concrete criticism states arguments for achieving concrete results.

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» To Bulgaria, the Mechanism for Cooperation and Verification is of big importance and a way for the country to receive cooperation and solidarity in the reforms in one of the most difficult sections - Justice and Home Affairs, as well as to inform its partners from the EU Member States about the achieved results. It is useful as a "criteria code" according to which the progress of reforms to be assessed.

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» We emphasize Bulgaria's adherence to this mechanism which was introduced with the full assistance of the country. We hold firmly to its established subject framework and our first response will be to formulate an action plan with a strict calendar to the end of the year in order to meet all recommendations in the report.

» We express our regret for the temporary suspension of accreditations of two of the agencies under Phare programme, which will deprive Bulgaria of 250 mln Euro. At the same time, we are convinced that the strengthening of the expert potential on the operational programmes, an explicit requirement of the report, is to a great extent to the benefit of Bulgarian institutions and citizens.

» Bulgarian Government and National Assembly have the necessary political will to continue their work in order to achieve concrete results, especially in the field of fight against organized crime and corruption. After the structural and personnel changes the Government made, which are correctly assessed in the report, there is better consolidation of Bulgarian institutions for accelerating the work. The public opinion, which can be described as very intolerable towards every suspicion for corruption, is a strong supporting factor for these efforts.

» We are going to increase drastically the measures for overcoming corruption and crime. We rely on the full cooperation of society, business, and political parties in this respect. Authoritative non-governmental organizations, whose expert opinion is used in the report, will be involved in the control of the action plan's implementation and their ideas and recommendations will be considered.

» There is criticism for the efficiency of the judiciary system in the report. We have to admit the fact that this criticism is shared by Bulgarian society. Bulgarian institutions will make it possible to analyze the criticism in a straightforward debate with the judiciary system itself. Yet, we have to say that activating Bulgarian justice and effective sentences for organized crime and corruption is the unconditional measure for the efficiency of the independent Judiciary and this is explicitly mentioned in the report.

» It is especially important to appreciate highly the European Commission's partnership regarding the final version of the report. Some of the expert conclusions, formulated in the first version, which were unacceptable for Bulgarian side, were changed on political level. Example for this is binding the Mechanism for Cooperation and Verification with key priorities for Bulgaria like Schengen and the Euro zone, as well as some assessments Bulgaria found incorrect. It is too superficially and not serious to say that the changed assessment is an act of "pardon" on the part of the Commission. On the contrary, we are respected by the Commission's partnership style of dialogue and the correctness to Bulgarian arguments.

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» Bulgaria accepts with satisfaction the European Commission's resolution to lift safeguard clause on aviation safety. The decision was based on two inspections by the European Aviation Safety Agency which proved that Bulgaria meets all European standards and requirements in the field of aviation.

### 2. Regarding the European funds management report

- » Bulgaria works actively with the European institutions regarding the European funds.
- » Regarding Justice and Home Affairs, too, Bulgaria expects the respective European institutions to apply one and the same criteria and standards to all EU Member States.
- » We are going to do our best to create the necessary conditions for absorbing maximum part of the funds; Bulgaria can receive from the EU. We realize this is an ambitious task having in mind our experience and the still insufficient administrative capacity.
- » Bulgaria expresses its regret about this resolution despite the active work of Bulgarian institutions for recovery of the trust in these agencies in the last few months.
- » We realize that the reasons for that is bad communication, insufficient measures for financial control in the funds' absorption, not good enough work of the administration. These are problems, existing from the previous governments.
- » From total of 650 mln Euro under the Phare programme, Bulgaria will not be able to absorb one fifth not only because of the suspension of accreditations, but because of the expiring in the end of November term for the last contracts. We are going to make analyses and will announce the concrete institutions which failed to prepare their projects.
- » However, there are very well absorbed funds under the Phare programme. We are going to look back and check the already absorbed funds under the programme.
- » We are aware that our country should take urgent measures regarding the European funds. The Government has political will and is ready to take all necessary measures - legislative, procedural and organizational, personnel.