

Comment: Bulgaria and the EU two years after the accession

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By Catherine Guy-Quint, MEP (PES, France). The comment is made for the newsletter “Progress Watch”. Original version – available on the French-language section of Europe.bg.

Bulgaria, being under surveillance since January 2007 after joining the European Union, was severely sanctioned by the European Commission, which in its report from 23 July 2008 points at the lack of progress achieved in the domains of the judiciary reform, the fight against corruption and the organized crime. Yet another report – by OLAF – also reveals serious frauds in the Community funds management.

Still, do we have to consider the Commission’s approach as recognized failure of the European authorities, who had been confident that the reform process would speed up as a result of the EU accession?

I do not think so.

There are two facts in support of my assertion. On the one hand, the EC report unequivocally concludes that the Bulgarian procedures and institutions, responsible for the fight against corruption, are inefficient in their practice. On the other hand, analysts comment that before accession the European Union has exercised an excellent influence in the sphere of fight against corruption, but this influence has melted almost to zero the moment of the countries joined the Union of freely circulating goods, capitals and people.

What I am actually saying is that the responsibility is common. To blame Bulgaria is easier than to reflect upon better ways, in which the European Union could solve this problem. I am not trying to underestimate the facts. Corruption is an evil that we have to vigorously fight with; and the Commission, which is in charge of the enforcement of the community law on the EU territory should provide for respect of the rule of law.

However, respect of rule of law and of the good financial management principles, which determine the Community funds’ distribution, depends exclusively on the Member States – on their good will and capacity to ensure the enforcement of the decisions, taken in Brussels or Strasbourg. But the different Member States do not possess equal resources in this respect.

The European Union should act in support of Bulgaria in its fight against the virus of corruption. It is evident that the abuses should be sanctioned, but the repressive approach should not be a substitute of

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a long lasting reflection. From that moment on, numerous questions should be raised on what is the role of the EU in disseminating good anticorruption practices; and what resources are we able to provide to the Union in order to make sure that corruption and bad management, which affect all the Member States, would progressively disappear?

In fact we cannot urge Bulgaria to provide the conditions, which a good number of "old" Member States do not actually respect, in a more categorical way. Here I think for example of the intra-EU VAT frauds (the regularly announced figures of estimated cost of the VAT frauds amount, according to the Council of Europe, to some EUR 100 billion per year).

Therefore it is our common responsibility to fight with the bad management and the frauds, and this is rooted deep back into our collective destiny of building policies together. We would however not be able to build up this space of sharing and solidarity without actively integrating our political activities into a global approach, which will give way to the specific form of expression of the Union's solidarity with Bulgaria.

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