

MICHAEL LEIGH IS NOT INFORMED ABOUT THE INTENTION OF THE GOVERNMENT TO HIRE LOBBYISTS FOR THE EU

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**MR MICHAEL LEIGH – TELEPHONE INTERVIEW,
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Interviewer: Ognian Boyadjiev, Portal Europe.bg

Hello, Mr. Leigh, thank you very much for giving this interview for Portal Europe.bg.

OK.

So, I have sent you some questions on the email. I would like to directly ask you the first question, about the statement of Mrs. Czarnota.

So ask your question then.

During the visit to Bulgaria, she was quoted by the Bulgarian newspapers as saying, “It will be surprising if we integrate [Bulgaria to the EU] unconditionally in 2007”. Is this the official statement of the European Commission?

As I indicated during my visit, the May report by the Commission is going to be adopted on the 16th of that month by the college of 25 commissioners, on the proposal from Mr. Oli Rehn. One of the purposes of my visit to Bulgaria was as fact finding to contribute to this report. At this stage, it's impossible to predict the recommendations to be contained in the report. When I was visiting Bulgaria, I pointed out that the report would be objective and neutral. But of course it has to be submitted to the college of 25 commissioners before it can be approved. So I can't comment at this stage on what the report will contain.

You said, it cannot be predicted, but was this a prediction, what Mrs. Czarnota said? She said: it will be surprising if we integrate unconditionally in 2007? Isn't this a prediction?

I've got no comments on what Mrs. Czarnota may or may not have said. I haven't heard the comment myself and I don't know what she may or may not have had in mind.

Did you discuss during your visit to Bulgaria with the Bulgarian counterparts about the [public procurement procedure for consultants and lobbyists](#) to accelerate the accession process?

No.

And are you personally informed about this intention of the government.

No.

Do you think that foreign consultants or lobbyists could really contribute to Bulgaria's faster

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accession to the EU?

It's up to each country to decide what kind of ... what kind of support they need from the private sector. I can't really take a view on that.

One of the problems here, discussed by the EU experts in Bulgaria, is the ratification process of the Treaty for accession, in the national parliaments of the member – states. It is considered too slow some times. Do you have an observation of the speed?

I believe that the latest picture is, that 14 member – states have ratified the Treaty. As you know, we have 25 member – states, so another 11 [have not]... and I believe that the procedure have been begun in other member – states. So it seems to me that this process is under way and that we have well over half the member – states [that] have already ratified.

Have other countries from the 10 member – states that integrated the Union in 2004, used – at your knowledge – [the assistance of foreign consultants](#)?

I have no idea.

What is your understanding of the term, 'full membership' into the EU: yesterday night, in a televised interview, the Prime Minister Stanishhev used the term 'full membership' many times. If the safeguard clauses are activated, does that mean that the membership will be full?

There is only one kind of membership in the European Union. If you look over the history of the European Union from its very beginning, there is no other type of membership.

So, we can conclude that the term "full membership" is not fully correct?

There is no other type of membership in the European Union. For example, there is no such thing as associate membership. We have some countries, which have association agreements for the European Union, and sometimes, on the colloquial basis, countries, which have association agreements, are referred to as associate members, for example. But in reality, you are either a member of the European Union, or you are not a member of the European Union. There is no other form of membership.

One MP from the European Parliament, Mrs. Els De Groen from the Green party – a Dutch member – criticized today and yesterday the ex - Prime Minister Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, stating that he is involved in corruption mechanisms during his mandate as Prime Minister. And she has asked the European Commission officially on this issue. Should a comment, on that stage – at your knowledge – be released by the Commission?

I haven't seen the question and it has not been referred to me.

She is referring also to other instances, cases of probable corruption in Bulgaria. Still, is it the primary problem of the present and the previous government?

The fact that the fight against corruption in a general sense is a priority of the Bulgarian government and it is an issue, which figured in our monitoring report of October. And during my visit, for example, recently to Bulgaria, one of the main subjects that I discussed with my interlocutors was the fight against corruption. This is a major subject, which engages both the EU and Bulgaria.

And the last thing she said is that Romania is ahead of us with the recent developments with the ex – Prime Minister [Nastase]. Do you agree with that statement?

I haven't got any comment on that.

I thank you very much for this interview.