

IT ASSOCIATION ALARMS FOR CORRUPTION IN THE STATE ADMINISTRATION MINISTRY

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Summary of the latest developments related to the activities of the Ministry of State Administration and Administrative Reform in Bulgaria.

The public procurement procedure for e-government should be suspended, this project will never be implemented and it costs too much money – reads a special declaration announced Wednesday July 26 by BAIT – the Bulgarian Association for Information Technologies. BAIT comprises some 200 member companies occupying together almost 70% of the Bulgarian IT market.

This association has reacted to the public tender called by the Ministry of state administration.

The tender is on supplying and setting up and integrated e-government system and is worth at least EUR 3 million. Two companies applied for the tender – Hewlett Packard Bulgaria and Siemens Business Services.

According to BAIT, the requirements in the tendering procedure are organized in such a way, so that a concrete company would win the tender, namely Hewlett Packard.

There is much about the hardware and almost nothing on the software product in the tender's documentation, and the hardware requirements is directly copied and pasted by... the customers' brochures of HP, the experts alarmed.

This particular tender is only a minor element that constitutes all the tendering procurement procedures, all-typical for the Ministry of state administration, BAIT stated.

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Other, previous, instances of corruption in the Ministry itself are for example the serious misuse of procedures for tenders of supplying schools with PCs and their internet-inter-connection.

Concerning the e-government tendering requirements, BAIT experts think, there is practically no Bulgarian IT-company that would have been able to win this tender.

Moreover, almost all tenders won by foreign contractors are unsatisfactory in terms of results. Therefore the Association calls for this tender to be cancelled and a Bulgarian company to be re-selected, as it would know much better what the current status of the Bulgarian business is, in order to best implement the necessary tasks under the e-government requirements.

BAIT sent an open letter on July 25 to the Prime minister, forwarded to the ministers of administration, education and economy, as well as to the Chief prosecutor, the chief of the State agency for IT, the State Financial control institution, etc. In this letter, the BAIT members say that it has become a very frequent phenomenon for corruption to dominate over all public tenders in Bulgaria, with civil servant more and more deeply being involved in the bribery mechanisms.

BAIT experts explain in their letter that the corruption environment starts from the very documentation of the tendering procedures – the requirements set up for participants by the civil servants are made so that a particular “favourite” company to be only potential and real winner of the tender.

In the letter, BAIT concludes that all these tendering procedures are “surrounded by all-level corruption”. The experts call for the Prime Minister to intervene and stop the procedure because building and developing the e-government is too important for the society in order to “sacrifice its failure” to the detriment of the tax-payers...

Such tenders, given their complexity, should not be held by the administration in secrecy and “absolute lack of transparency” but only through a public debate and a preliminary professional debate with the participation of a wide range of IT players on the Bulgarian market, represented namely by BAIT.

BAIT notes that a lot of international IT companies have been unpleasantly surprised by the tendentious tender documentation and have protested in court against the procedure with the assistance of BAIT. The association has tried to avert minister Vassilev much sooner through writing a letter to him; but his reply has been too “formal” and therefore BAIT has made this open letter addressing it to the Prime Minister.

BAIT is signalling that a very big amount of money for the Bulgarian standards – 6 million leva (EUR 3 million) will be spent for this tender but the requirements are so adjusted that the real start of the e-government will be “incessantly delayed for the future”. There is a clear attempt to discriminate all Bulgarian potential candidates for this tender.

Minister Nikolai Vassilev has held a press-conference to answer all these claims and refuted all allegations.

“These allegations are rooted in purely corporate interests of circles, which are willing for our ministry to

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commit a failure in developing the e-government”, Vassilev told the press conference. He noted he might bring BAIT to court for these allegations.

Vassilev repeated the encouraging declarations made by Commissioners Kallas and Rehn in Brussels just recently, expressing support and confidence in the Bulgarian administrative reform and the e-government introduction plans of minister Vassilev.