

## EU COMMISSION: BULGARIA HAS NO CLEAR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

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### ***It's the Finance ministry's responsibility, as the European Commission rebukes Bulgaria's strategic aims.***

*By Boriana Yotova, Mediapool July 26, 2006; translated by Portal EUROPE.*

The European commission (EC) has rejected for re-writing the National strategic reference framework. This is one of the basic documents with which Bulgaria offers its priorities for financing by EU-funds for the period 2007-2013.

The main remark by the European experts is that in this document – which is prepared by the Bulgarian Finance ministry under the direct auspices of vice-minister Lubomir Datzov – there are no clearly defined priorities, government sources told Mediapool.

This criticism was unofficially confirmed by members of the political cabinet of the Finance ministry in Sofia.

Mediapool reminds that, in mid-July, while presenting the National strategy for infrastructural development, Prime Minister Stanishev has announced that always the first year after accession is "extremely weak for each new member state, in terms of EU-funds absorption". Bulgaria will not be an exception, Stanishev added.

It is expected that Bulgaria will not be able to receive a major part of the free European money.

The framework for support by the EU envisages, for the 7-year period, Bulgaria to be granted EUR 11 billion. This money, however, should be absorbed on the basis of projects, prepared in advance; as well as in accordance with clearly formulated consensual national priorities. In addition, the state budget is to co-finance the projects by 15%.

According to Mediapool sources, at a meeting last week, EC representatives have recommended to the Finance Ministry team to re-write anew the priorities by the sectoral operational programmes – the so-called OP's. In the EU-experts' opinion, the operational programmes (OP's) – which are drawn up by the respective ministries – are acceptable, in contrast to the big "strategic" document written by the Finance Ministry.

According to sources who took part in that meeting, vice-minister Datzov and his team were given a one-month deadline for preparation of the new document. It is also stated that the Finance Minister Plamen Oresharski is very angry to his deputy Datzov – who is from the NMSS quota – as well as to the director of the EU-Funds Management Directorate Boriana Pencheva.

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According to information from the Finance Ministry, the document is not "officially rejected for re-writing", as it has been "unofficially send for consultations in the European Commission". Of course, there is a lot of criticism, but you shouldn't take it too dramatically, Mediapool sources also said. These sources denied about any tension from the part of minister Oresharski.

The official reaction of the Finance Ministry is, as follows: at this stage, this document is a working document (a draft) and until September "it could be consulted and corrected (improved) yet another couple of times by the European experts."

Mediapool comments in conclusion, that the criticisms towards vice-minister Datzov – who has been managing the EU-money at the Finance Ministry for 4 years now – are for the first time debunking the myth, created during the Saxe Coburg Gotha government – that the Finance ministry is very well working when it comes to EU-funds – to the contrast of the sectoral ministries which are much weaker with regards to the same criterion in comparison to the "super Finance Ministry"... These sectoral ministries are, as follows, of Construction, of Environment, of Agriculture, of Social affairs and of Economy.

So far all the criticisms by the media and by the government – including for lack of administrative capacity – were targeted to the sectoral ministries only.

**Novinite.com explains: The National Strategic Reference Framework document outlines the strategic aims of the policy for development and the priorities that would be co-financed by the EU Structural instruments for 2007-2013. The Structural and Cohesion Funds are EU's main instruments for supporting social and economic restructuring across the EU. They account for over one third of the EU budget and are used to tackle regional disparities and support regional development. This is done by developing infrastructure, telecommunications and human resources and supporting research.**