



NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

STATEMENT

OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA ON THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION OPINION ON SERBIA'S APPLICATION FOR EU MEMBERSHIP

At a joint sitting, held on December 15, 2011, the **Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds** and the **Foreign Policy and Defence Committee** discussed the **Commission Opinion on Serbia's application for EU membership**, included as **item 63** of the Bulgarian Parliament Annual Working Programme on EU Affairs (2011).

Having discussed *the Commission Opinion on Serbia's Application for Membership of the European Union, COM (2011) 668*, the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds and the Foreign Policy and Defence Committee **expressed their unanimous support for the following statement** which is to be sent to the EU institutions:

1. We consider the Commission recommendation to grant Serbia **the status of candidate country** to be an acknowledgement of that country's **consistent efforts** and its commitment to EU integration. We see the recommendation as a positive assessment on Serbia's progress towards integration with EU structures. We support the European Council conclusion of 9 December 2011 to pass a decision on granting Serbia candidate-country status in 2012, provided Serbia continues to demonstrate a reliable commitment and achieves additional progress in the bona fide implementation of agreements reached in the course of the dialogue, including those concerning integrated border management, reaches an agreement concerning inclusive regional cooperation, and demonstrates a track record of having actively cooperated with EULEX and KFOR.

2. It is our position that Serbia's successful integration is achievable subject to a clearly demonstrated **compliance with the membership criteria**, including the Copenhagen criteria, and implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU. We underline Serbia's considerable progress in meeting the political criteria concerning the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. We welcome the establishment of a comprehensive constitutional, legislative and institutional framework which overall corresponds to European and international standards of rule of law, including the fight against corruption and organised crime, protection of human rights and the rights of minorities.

2.1. We recognize Serbia's efforts towards EU integration and the strong commitment of Serbian authorities to achieve progress and in particular, **the legislative reforms** undertaken as part of the process. We welcome the adoption of a more transparent legal framework of elections and the steps undertaken in fighting corruption, such as the law on financing of political parties. We underline the importance of the next stage of reforms, i.e. implementation and enforcement of legislation in that area, and more specifically, the implementation of the action plan and strategy on fighting corruption and organised crime.

2.2. We welcome the important steps taken by Serbia towards establishing a functioning market economy and the level of macroeconomic stability achieved against the backdrop of the

global economic and financial crisis. We stress on the need for further efforts in restructuring the economy and improving the business environment, and for further structural reforms in order to upgrade the productive capacity of the economy and create a climate conducive to increased foreign investment.

2.3. We encourage the continuation of the integration process and further efforts to ensure the implementation of legislation, more specifically in the areas of agriculture and rural development, judiciary and fundamental rights, justice, freedom and security and financial control. We note that **full compliance with the acquis** in the field of the environment and climate change could be achieved only in the long term and provided there are increased levels of investment.

3. We view positively the arrests of General Ratko Mladic and Goran Hadzic, accused in **war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia**, and acknowledge those developments as a considerable contribution to the reconciliation process in the region.

4. We express our serious concern with the situation in the north of Kosovo. We hope that the agreements achieved in the **dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina**, which went off to a good start, will be implemented in good faith. The dialogue needs to continue on topics where no agreement has been reached to date, and solutions should be sought in the context of the principles of regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations.

5. We consider the successful implementation of legislation concerning **national minorities** as key to the development of good neighbourly relations and the further EU integration of Serbia.

6. We welcome Serbia's participation in the **Danube Strategy** as a further step in the process of its integration in terms of EU values and principles.

7. We encourage Serbia to keep up the pace of reforms needed to achieve the necessary compliance with EU membership criteria, paying specific attention to the rule of law, and to continue its constructive engagement in regional cooperation and **strengthen bilateral cooperation with neighbouring states**.