



NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

STATEMENT

OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA ON THE ANNUAL EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY (ENP) PACKAGE WITH A FOCUS ON THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

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 **Annual European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) package, with a focus on the Eastern Partnership, included as item 61** of the Bulgarian Parliament Annual Working Programme on EU Affairs (2011).

Having discussed the European Commission Annual ENP Package – *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood, COM (2011) 303*, 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 welcome the priority which the EU attaches to the process of stabilisation and democratisation in its neighbourhood countries and acknowledge the efforts made to strengthen dialogue in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).
2. We believe that the revised ENP should be based on the principles of differentiation, as per the individual needs of our neighbours, more rigorous conditionality of the assistance made available, depending on compliance with the political criteria (in line with the approaches of “more funding for more reforms” and “less for less”), and more local ownership on the part of partners.
3. We strongly support Poland’s initiative to set a **European Endowment for Democracy**, to facilitate the access of non-profit organisations from the EU Neighbourhood regions to European funding. In our opinion, the initiative has the potential to generate added value for ENP and increase the visibility of EU on the ground. The implementation of EU instruments and facilities, including in the framework of ENP, should be driven by a cost-benefit approach.

Concerning the Eastern Partnership (EaP):

4. We believe that the Eastern Partnership is focused on countries which have a desire to develop and make progress, and serves as a tool for reform. We support the significance attached by the Commission/European External Action Service (EEAS) Communication to **deepening cooperation with Eastern Partners**, which are particularly important for us. We underline Bulgaria’s willingness, as a strategically important regional partner, to share its experience gained in the process of EU integration.
5. We believe that there is a strong need for EaP partner countries to stick to their commitment to **build a lasting democracy, with rule of law, justice and respect for human rights**.

We welcome the Joint Declaration approved at the EaP Warsaw Summit (29-30 September).

6. We believe that the Eastern Partnership initiative needs a further impulse. We hope that the development of the agreed **Road Map** to implementing the measures highlighted in the Joint Declaration will help focus our efforts. We recognize the EEAS potential in this process, with a stronger regional presence. We stress on the Bulgaria's role in the dialogue with EaP countries and its willingness to share its experience from EU integration and democratic transition processes.
7. We believe that EaP should deliver in all of its dimensions and with all partners, through implementing **pragmatic projects with outputs which are clear and have a tangible effect for the citizens**. Strengthening the linkages among the bilateral and multilateral tracks in EaP activities and promoting **regional cooperation** among partner countries are key to enhancing the efficiency of the initiative.
8. We believe that the success of the Eastern Partnership is determined by **the efficient use of all funding opportunities**, and the improvement of existing financial instruments.
9. We support the stated willingness to sign **Association Agreements**, and **Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements** with Eastern Partners as an element of the revised neighbourhood policy.
10. We note the importance attached by the European Commission to **visa liberalization**. We agree that the EU should continue to undertake steps towards a visa-free regime as a long-term goal. The pace of that process will depend exclusively on **the individual efforts of each country in implementing the indicated priority measures**.
11. We believe that **security**, in its various dimensions, remains a key challenge for the efficient implementation of the Eastern Partnership, and for its development and stability. Joint discussions involving partner countries to explore various options to strengthen the EU commitment to regional security, and enhance interaction, especially in combating organised crime, trafficking in human beings and corruption should continue and intensify. There is a need for political will and practical activity. It is important that our joint efforts focus on promoting people-to-people contacts and confidence building among people in conflict areas.
 - 11.1 It is particularly important to further cooperation with EaP countries in the area of **energy security** with a view of diversifying energy supply and an increased regional stability. We believe that this can be achieved by streamlining work on concrete projects. We welcome the continuing efforts to support the implementation of the Southern Energy Corridor, and the establishment of the Eastern Europe Energy Efficiency and Environment Partnership, and the accession to the European Energy Community Treaty by Ukraine and Republic of Moldova. We believe that NABUCCO, as an energy bridge from Asia to Europe, should be considered by EaP countries as one of their priority projects since it is an alternative for diversification of energy resources in Europe and provides support for EU energy security.
 - 11.2 We support the approach seeking a balance between EU's fundamental values such as freedom, solidarity and justice, and ensuring EU security. Being an external border of the EU, Bulgaria considers the **geopolitical security in the region** as a priority. We underline

the role played by Bulgaria in ensuring EU border security and the potential to be activated by it upon full accession to the Schengen Agreement.

- 12.** We welcome **the wide involvement of all stakeholders: civil society, parliaments, and the business community**, with a view of achieving EaP goals in establishing the values of democracy, sustainable economic and social development, and cohesion of EaP countries with the EU.
 - 12.1** We note the particular importance of the **parliamentary dimension of cooperation** with partner countries, in the framework of **EURONEST**, and we welcome the additional opportunities it provides for exchanging opinions in areas of common interest such as stability, democracy, alignment of legislation and standards, trade, energy, people-to-people contacts, etc. We welcome the election of a Bulgarian MEP to serve as a deputy chair of the forum and see this as recognition of Bulgaria's role involving EaP countries in the processes of a shared commitment to EU values.
 - 12.2** We support EU efforts to **involve Belarus** in the dialogue to establish the principles of democratic development in EU neighbour countries. We expect that the next **EURONEST** meeting to be held in May 2012 will provide an additional impetus to integration and cooperation process in the region.
- 13.** We see the Eastern Partnership and The Black Sea Synergy as useful instruments of EU's Neighbourhood Policy which bring neighbourhood countries closer to the EU. We regret that the recent Commission and EEAS documents on ENP and EaP make no mention of the Black Sea Synergy or the Black Sea region. We believe that the Black Sea region has a potential which remains underused. In that regard, we note the need for an improved focusing of efforts on developing a comprehensive EU approach to the Black Sea region, e.g. through a comprehensive Black Sea Strategy. Setting up a specialized EEAS unit to be responsible for the implementation of the new strategy would signify the importance which the External Action Service attaches to the region.