

**REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA  
FORTY-FIRST NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

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**COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS AND  
OVERSIGHT OF THE EUROPEAN FUNDS**

**STATEMENT**

**RE: Annual Enlargement Package 2012-2013 of the European Commission**

During a meeting, held on **31 October 2012**, the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds (CEAOEF) discussed the Annual Enlargement Package of the European Commission regarding the enlargement, included as it. 48 of the Annual Work Programme on European Union Issues (2012), and more specifically the *Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council – Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2012-2013 – COM (2012) 600*.

The Annual Enlargement Package is discussed at a meeting of the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, held on 18 October 2012. Within the framework of the meeting, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria Nikolay Mladenov has presented the position of the country concerning the candidate states and potential candidates for EU membership.

*On the basis of the conducted discussion of the Annual Enlargement Package of the European Commission by both parliamentary commissions, the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds has **unanimously adopted** the following statement for sending to the European institutions:*

**1.** We welcome the presented EU Annual Enlargement Package 2012-2013 and share the understanding that the enlargement process is a factor, contributing to a higher security and prosperity on the European continent, simultaneously with that being the leading condition for the positive changes in the countries from the Western Balkan region. We support the conviction that the solving of the issue of the integration of the Western Balkans with EU is not only a historic mission of EU, but a necessary future for the whole Balkan Peninsula.

**2.** The present difficulties in front of EU **should not weaken the dynamics of the enlargement process**. Today, when Europe is in a process of intensive institutional and economic transformation, **the debate for the future of the Western Balkans is a priority issue for the European Agenda**. The strengthening of the stability and democracy in South Eastern Europe means to invest in the building of **sustainable democracy in the EU neighbours**.

We support the moving forward of the enlargement process, since EU enlargement brings mutual benefits for the member countries and EU as a whole. The Enlargement Package shows that the enlargement focus is reserved in the European Agenda. EU continues to observe the

overtaken commitments towards the member countries, considering the important steps in the European integration process of the countries in the region made in the past year. In each one of these countries, although to a different degree, positive developments are outlined, which represent a proof for the transforming effect of the enlargement policy. After the signing of the Croatia Accession Treaty and the granting of candidate member state status to Serbia, the opening of the negotiations for the accession of Montenegro to the EU is an important step for the region and EU as a whole.

**3. The good neighbourly relations and the regional cooperation** are issues of paramount importance for the readiness of the countries from the Western Balkans to become affiliated with the EU values. We think that the regional cooperation, strengthening the conciliation and supporting the EU integration should continue to be a main element of the EU Stabilization and Association Process. We support the EC recommendation the countries from the region to invest in their European future, overcoming the stereotypes from the past. In this connection, our country can share useful experience not only related with the process of Euro-Atlantic Integration, but also regarding the building of sustainable model of ethnic tolerance.

**4.** Bulgaria is an active participant in multiple regional initiatives and cooperation formats. Objective of the Bulgarian participation in them is the preservation of the integration nature of the regional cooperation, opened towards the European and Euro-Atlantic integration processes. The good inter-institutional coactivity is an additional incentive in that direction.

**5.** The common problems require a common approach, exceeding the efforts of only one state. There is a need for “strategic thinking” and clear vision for the development of SEE region.

As a key priority in the preparation process of the countries from the Western Balkans for EU and NATO membership, we outline **the building of adequate regional (transport, energy, communication) infrastructure**. Realizing this aspect, we think that integrated measures to overcome the deficit of infrastructure and connectivity in the SEE region are required, which in their turn will help to overcome the physical barriers and increase the stability and competitiveness in the whole region.

In this sense we are discussing the **trans-border cooperation programs** not only as an important instrument in the preparation of the countries from the Western Balkans in the EU enlargement process, but as a way for Europe to communicate with its neighbours, encouraging the local and regional development. We think that these programs and the implementation of the macro-regional strategies, such as the Danube Strategy, can offer innovative solutions to the common problems through coordinated joint actions and pilot projects.

**5 Trans-European transport corridors pass through Bulgaria**, which determines its important strategic location as a “cross-road” between Europe and Asia. One of these corridors is **Corridor No 8**, which connects the international flows from and to the Balkans to and from Central and Western Europe. The absence of suitable infrastructure to the west of the Bulgarian border questions the functioning of Corridor No 8 in near future, setting the need for joint European efforts for the successful implementation of this project. It should be mentioned that

Bulgaria is modernizing with accelerated rates its road infrastructure, and a big portion of the investments represent European funds. Bulgaria has outlined as priority 7 motorways (*Lyulin, Trakiya, Maritsa, Struma, Kalotina, Hemus and Chernomorec*), which ensure transport connectivity representing a part of the TEN-T network.

We encourage approach, under which to search for efficient and operable connection between the Territorial Cooperation Programmes, Connecting Europe Facility instrument, and the Trans-European Networks (TENs) Regulations for the implementation of the programs during the new programmatic period of the Cohesion Policy 2014-2020.

In the search for innovative solutions for the common challenges, related to the development of the transport and energy infrastructure, environment, SME, we think that the created **Investment Framework for the Western Balkans** (combining financial resource from the EU budget, the international financial institutions, and other donors) should find bigger implementation during the next programmatic period.

6. We share the outlined by the EC challenges in front of the enlargement and more specifically the need **to speed up the implementation of the expected reforms** in the field of the democratic governance and the strengthening of the rule of law; the regional cooperation and conciliation on the Western Balkans, as well as the strengthening of the economic stability and growth of the acceding countries under the conditions of Eurozone's difficulties and the global financial crisis.

With regard to the **rule of law** issues, we share the evaluation for their important significance in the preparation process. The new approach for starting a dialogue on the "**difficult chapters**"<sup>1</sup> early in the negotiation process with the aim to provide enough time to achieve convincing results should be incentive for the reform in this sector, and not means for weakening their dynamics.

With regard to the **economic challenges**, we share the EC vision that the enlargement process is a powerful instrument for strengthening the economic stability and growth of the acceding countries, through the opportunities for access to the EU Common Market, as well as through the adoption of the strategic approach of long-term financial stability.

7. We support the understanding that each country, striving at EU membership should be **evaluated objectively, according to its own merits**.

The progress of the countries from the Western Balkans depends on the individual meeting of the Copenhagen criteria and the terms of the Stabilization and Association Process, incl. development of regional cooperation and maintenance of good neighbourly relations. In this connection higher speed of adjustment of the policies in the member states to the European standards and requirements is needed, so that two processes – of transformation and integration, leading to the europeanization in them are accomplished simultaneously. The right

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<sup>1</sup> Negotiation chapter 23 "Judiciary and Fundamental Rights" and negotiation chapter 24 "Judiciary, Freedom and Security".

way for their achievement is the European integration of the Balkans with the observance of clear and transparent rules.

In its capacity of EU member state and SEE state, Bulgaria consistently supports the European future of the countries from the Western Balkans. As EU and NATO member, our country is responsible for the improvement and the ensuring of long-term stability and prosperity in the region. Our commitment is based on the conviction that only in this way we shall help the reforms of our neighbours, as well as the friendly relations throughout the whole region. Stable Western Balkans means Stable Europe.

**With regard to the EU candidate members:**

**1. Croatia**

The Bulgarian Parliament was among the first national parliaments, which declared its full support for the Croatia's EU membership, ratifying unanimously Croatia's EU Accession Treaty on 17 February 2012 and the only one, which made this step in the presence of the President of the Croatian Parliament. We share our firm conviction that Croatia is contributing to the geopolitical, cultural and tangible value added of the region.

The pending Croatia's EU accession represents an important stage of the historical project for the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU. It is a proof that the **EU membership is achievable objective upon implementation of the established criteria and standards**. In this context, it should serve as **incentive and catalyst for the remaining part of the countries in the region**, which should speed up the reforms' implementation progress and their European perspective.

We share EC evaluation and recommendations, contained in the progress report from 10 October. We expect the country to retain the rate of the reforms in order to be able to accomplish all overtaken commitments by the membership date.

**2. Turkey**

We take into account the key role of Turkey for EU, as a country with dynamic economy, strategic location and important regional role. It is important for Bulgaria to have a stable neighbour, accomplishing democratic reforms. This is important for the whole European Union. In this connection we think that the good collaboration related to international political topics of mutual interest, among which are the Middle East and North Africa, should continue.

We think that the course of the negotiation with Turkey depends on the speed of the accomplishment of the internal reforms in response to the membership criteria in compliance with the principle for evaluation based on the own merits. Therefore, we welcome the positive developments, among which are the establishment of Ombudsman institution, the initiation of a debate on the new Constitution and the continuation of the judiciary reform.

We think that the creation of wider framework for dialogue and discussion between EU and Turkey in the field of Justice and Internal Affairs will be of mutual benefit. It is important for Turkey to address the issues of the independence and efficiency of the judiciary.

We share the EC evaluation, according to which there is a lack of important progress in the implementation of the political criteria and more concretely in the observance of the fundamental rights in Turkey. The Kurdish problem remains a key challenge for the Turkish democracy.

The signing of the Readmission Agreement by Turkey, as well as its ratification and effective implementation, is of priority importance.

With regard to the Foundation Act, related to the restitution of the real estates to the different religions, we share the evaluation and welcome the achieved progress. We expect from Turkey to ensure conditions for full implementation of the law.

The obligations under the agreement should be observed and in this connection we reckon that the attachment by Turkey of the Additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement will open the road to the activation of the negotiation process.

### **3. Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)**

We support the European and Euro-Atlantic perspective of the Republic of Macedonia, but we expect it to continue with the implementation of the necessary reforms. In the spirit of good neighbourly relations, since the very recognition of the independence of Macedonia, our country is open for cooperation and support, both with regard to the Euro-Atlantic perspective of our west neighbour, as well as with regard to the solving of problems of common interest. Therefore we express worry that regardless of the declared and demonstrated support, the Republic of Macedonia is performing actions, concerning the cultural and historical heritage of Bulgaria. We express our concern from the increasing in the recent years, nationalistic rhetoric on the part of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and the led by the mass media policy, which deliberately is building negative image of our country, including through a series of projects with state funding. Излишно е да се губи енергия и да се изразходват усилия и финансови средства в организирането на събития, които не допринасят за подобряването на добросъседските отношения.

The ongoing efforts for many years of Bulgaria to resolve the open problems with Macedonia in a bilateral dialogue have not produced a positive result. We think that setting forth the existing problems in an open manner in front of our European partners will guarantee the stability on the Balkans in the long run and we rely that our arguments will be properly apprehended by our partners in the EU.

The evaluation of the achievements of our western neighbour will depend on the implementation of all membership criteria, in this number regional cooperation and sincere good neighbourly relations, built on the basis of the European values and rules. The trans-border cooperation is a key element, facilitating the free movement of people, goods and

capital, and the building of trust and lasting relations in the region. In this sense, the building of transport corridor No 8, including the railway line Sofia-Skopje remains as a main our priority.

For us, as a neighbouring to Macedonia country, is extremely important to accomplish a series of reforms in the field of the observance of the rule of law and its strict implementation in all areas of the public-political life of the country, without selective approach; the media legislation, overcoming “the language of hatred”, used in the media space in relation to neighbouring countries; resolving the issues, regarding the discrimination of the citizens with Bulgarian self-consciousness, as well as the observance of the main rights and economic freedoms.

#### **4. Montenegro**

We welcome the decision for opening pre-accession negotiations with Montenegro on 29 June 2012, which reflects the consistent progress of the country in key areas.

From priority importance is the achievement of irreversible results in the combat with the organized crime and the high-level corruption. In compliance with the new approach with regard to “the difficult chapters”, we anticipate opening of the negotiations on them at an earlier stag of the negotiation process.

It is important for us **through the example of Montenegro to provide positive incentive also to the other countries in the region** to continue with the efforts for irreversible political and economic reforms and for attaining harmony with the European values and standards.

#### **5. Island**

We welcome the stable progress of Island in the negotiation process, which we consider long standing partner of EU, member of the European Economic Area and Schengen zone.

Considering the priority EU objectives with regard to “Europe 2020” Strategy, we think that there is a significant potential to develop the cooperation between EU and Island in such areas as renewable energy and climate changes.

#### **Regarding the countries, which are potential candidates for EU membership:**

#### **6. Albania**

We support the consistently European integration of Albania. We think that Albania should fully implement the twelve priorities, presented by EC, to move to a new stage in the European integration process.

We express our content with the EC opinion, which binds the granting of candidate status to Albania with the implementation of essential reforms in the judiciary and public administration, as well as with the introduction of amendments in the Parliamentary Rules of Procedure.

The accomplishment and implementation of the 12 priorities will open the road of Albania towards the initiation of the negotiation process. In this connection we believe that the parliamentary elections during 2013 will be held according to the standards.

## **7. Serbia**

We evaluate as objective the EC Report for Serbia regarding the meeting of the political criteria, the conditions of the Stabilization and Association Process, and the recommendation for more dynamic implementation of the reforms. As areas, in which Serbia should concentrate its efforts during the next period, may be outlined the constructive participation in the regional cooperation, the strengthening of the good neighbourly relations, the observance of the human rights, rule of law, and the reform of the judiciary.

Simultaneously, we express opinion that together with the work on the foreign-political priority – the European integration, the government in Belgrade should pay additional attention to the measures referring to the economic and financial situation. The lack of adequate actions in this direction could be a serious threat for the next stage of the Serbia's road to EU.

We support the opinion that Belgrade and Pristina should renew their dialogue as soon as possible with the reserved intermediary role of EU. It is necessary to achieve sustainable, visible and lasting improvement of the relations between Serbia and Kosovo, which in comprehensible perspective to also bring to their full normalization. The solving of the problems in North Kosovo, respecting the territorial integrity of Kosovo and the specific needs of the local population, should be a main element of this process.

## **8. Bosnia and Herzegovina**

We state with regret that Bosnia and Herzegovina is lagging behind its neighbours in the pursuit of the European perspective.

We join the EC appeal to the political leaders of the country to put much effort in the achievement of priorities, including: forming of state government, supplements of the Constitution pursuant to the decision of the European Court of Human Rights.

## **9. Kosovo**

We underline that the European perspective for the region will not be complete, if it does not include Kosovo. Bulgaria was among the first countries, which has recognized the independence of the Republic of Kosovo in March 2008. In connection with the fourth anniversary Kosovo's independence and in continuation of the implemented open, pragmatic and constructive policy on the part of the Republic of Bulgaria with regard to the states from the Western Balkans, upon initiative of the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds a **Friendship Group Bulgaria-Kosovo** has been created at the Bulgarian Parliament (11 April, 2012). Thus, the Bulgarian Parliament has demonstrated its support for the fruitful and efficient integration of the young state in the international community and for the encouragement of the democratic changes. This initiative has laid the foundation for the

more active joint work of the two parliaments as a platform for exchange of opinions and best practices, especially in the context of the European perspective on the Western Balkans.

Regarding the EC Report for Kosovo, we support the decision to start a new dialogue with the government on Pristina. We also expect real steps for the integration of the Serbs in North Kosovo. In this connection we underline that Kosovo can use not only the experience of Bulgaria with the processes of Euro-Atlantic integration, but also with the building of “intelligent” model of peaceful and tolerant existence of the ethnic minorities, such as the Bulgarian model.