

NATIONAL COUNTRY REPORT – BULGARIA

1. What are the highlights of your national debate on the future of the EU during the reflection period?

During the first half of 2006 Bulgarian public opinion was characterized by the expectations of both the Bulgarian political elite and Bulgarian society about the forthcoming release of the EU monitoring report on Bulgaria in May. The dominant media topic in this context was the exact date of Bulgarian accession, with speculations about the final date running from 1 January 2007 (according to plan) to 1 January 2008 (because of lack of deep reforms in crucial areas). The date 1 January 2007 turned into a particular obsession in Bulgarian media. Other main issues, which received significant media coverage were speculations about the possible scenarios for survival of the Bulgarian coalition government¹ after the release of the May 2006 Monitoring report by the European Commission. Those expectations and anxieties can explain an almost complete lack of public attention to the EU constitutional debate. The ratification crisis of the European Constitution has been regarded as an internal EU issue, in which Bulgaria has no explicitly expressed interest. A close look at the media publications from this period can give us the overall impression that focusing on the date and accession conditions² the Bulgarian political elite and society have totally neglected crucial topics, such as those concerning the institutional structure of the future enlarged Union and the development direction of its policies and competences. A logical conclusion in this respect could be that political leaders in Bulgaria have only vague concepts about the kind of EU we want or the kind of EU Bulgaria is going to join.

¹ The centre-left coalition government formed in late summer 2005 comprises the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), the National Movement Simeon the Second (NDSV) and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS – Turkish party).

² According to the Bulgarian Minister of European Affairs, Ms Meglena Kuneva the only real plan of the government, concerning the accession is the so called “Plan A” which is best expressed by the view that Bulgaria will be a member of the EU on 1 of January 2007 without the introduction of any safeguard clauses. Press conference of the Bulgarian Minister of European Affairs Meglena Kuneva, 22 March 2006, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg> (accessed at: 12.09.2006).

As a result, the debate about the current state and the future of the EU takes place in some Bulgarian media more as an “echo” of the positions on this problems presented in some of the EU member states, which are more active in the debate. Bulgarian media often preferred to present the state of debate in countries, such as Germany, France, Austria, and the United Kingdom, but without taking a particular position or expressing any significant comments. The EU debate is thus perceived as not relevant to Bulgaria’s imminent preoccupation – securing a timely and undisputed membership in the EU.

2. How are the costs and benefits of EU membership perceived in your country?

With the accession of Bulgaria to the EU growing near, more and more questions concerning the costs and benefits of the country’s EU membership are made subject to public debate. The cost/benefits discourse related to the future Romanian and Bulgarian EU membership could be identified in three main areas: political costs and benefits for the country, economic costs and benefits for the country, as well as costs and benefits for the entire region of South Eastern Europe³.

Political benefits

The first area where the EU could have a strong positive impact on Bulgaria is its political life. Bulgaria has accomplished the political criteria from Copenhagen, and has been recognised as a country with a democratic political system. However, it still can be argued that Bulgaria is a country of “weak democracy”. Its democratic traditions are rather feeble and democratic transition from the last sixteen years has put a very strong pressure on the proper functioning of democratic institutions. In the perspective of EU membership, the Bulgarian transition process has clearly demonstrated a lack of political and social will for radical reforms in many spheres of social life. Almost all political and economic reforms in the country have been implemented as a result of strong external pressure. Thus, the negotiations process between the EU and Bulgaria turned out to be a very effective tool stimulating both political and economic reforms in the country. The period of transition, having in mind the forthcoming accession, is at its end, but the phase of consolidation of Bulgarian democracy is

³ These three main aspects of costs/benefits are described and in the “Impact Analysis of the possible scenarios of Bulgaria’s membership in the EU, envisaged in the Accession Treaty”, elaborated in March 2006 by the GEPI expert group (Group for European Prognosis and Studies) of the Open Society Institute in Sofia; available at: <http://news.osf.bg> (accessed at: 12.09.2006).

still in its beginning. Bulgaria's EU membership will in this sense keep the launched political reforms on the right track and, what is even more important, it will help strengthening the adopted reformist agenda. Bulgarian membership could be interpreted as a process which could have a significant impact on the process of democracy consolidation in the country. The EU is perceived by the broad public as an instrument of consolidation of democracy and imposing the rule of law in Bulgaria. "The positive impact on Bulgaria would be crucial as the membership leads to important changes and reforms. The accession would create a favorable political environment, strengthening the rule of law and all democratic values."⁴

The difficulties during the process of transition have resulted in a very low level of public confidence in political parties as institutions, and respectively in their leaders as political figures. As a consequence, Bulgarian political institutions have been faced with a number of problems, hampering their efficient functioning. The added value of a successful Bulgarian accession will be the rehabilitation of the role of the Bulgarian political elite within the democratic system.⁵

Another important political benefit for the country will be the advantages, which accession could bring in terms of examples of good governance practices and modernization of the Bulgarian public administration.⁶ In view of the obvious failure of Bulgarian politicians and public administration to impose publicly recognized and respected rules, there is another feature of EU membership which corresponds to a common notion very broadly widespread in the Bulgarian society – the EU as an area of discipline, rule of law and administrative control: "European integration is interpreted as order and discipline, which Bulgarians have to get used to. This perception of imposing order and discipline from the "outside" is transferred to political parties. Whether they want it or not, political parties would have to reform and become more democratic, and this would happen when Bulgaria is accepted as a full member of the European Union."⁷

Economic benefits

⁴ "Impact Analysis...", p.2.

⁵ President of Bulgaria Georgi Parvanov, "Bulgaria na praga na Evropeiskia sajuz" ("Bulgaria at the doorstep of the EU"), lecture at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 24.02.2006, Berlin, available at [www. http:// www.president.bg](http://www.president.bg) (accessed at : 20.09.2006).

⁶ Bulgarian European Affairs Minister Meglena Kuneva, "Prisaediniavaneto i sled tova" ("The Accession and after that"), article for the newspaper Kapital, 13 May 2006, available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg> (accessed on 12. 09. 2006).

⁷ "Impact Analysis...", p. 7.

While reflecting on the Bulgarian public debate, we can identify a broadly shared expectation that EU membership will result in increasing the share of foreign investments and creating more opportunities for Bulgarian companies. Such expectations are best summarized in the lecture presented by the Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Berlin, in which he points out the following economic benefits for the country: the access of Bulgarian economic actors to a huge market, new economic partners and fresh capital leading to new economic development⁸. We could also find information about possible economic benefits in the already mentioned Impact Analysis: “ From Bulgaria’s perspective, accession to the EU within the initially agreed timeframe (i.e. without delays) generally means faster integration of the domestic economy into the global economy, increased competitiveness, and, ultimately, a boost in economic development. EU membership is expected to enhance foreign trade, strengthen competition on the domestic market, provide additional incentives for local companies to improve their productivity and efficiency, provide additional channels for transfer of technologies and know how, which would ultimately lead to sustainable growth in output capacity and labour productivity.”⁹

The implementation of the *acquis communautaire* will also be of additional advantage for the development of the Bulgarian business environment, since it is expected to stabilize it, making it more predictable: “Additionally, [the full implementation of the *acquis communautaire*] would provide strong stimuli for multinational companies to include Bulgaria in their Europe-wide business strategies, thus spurring foreign investment and supporting growth.”¹⁰ This understanding of EU membership as a membership within a common legal framework is shared by the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ivailo Kalfin as well: in a TV interview he points out imposing of rules and discipline from outside as a very important benefit for Bulgarian companies¹¹.

At the same time, the executive has adopted the understanding that Bulgaria will be able to achieve its economic goals only if the country determines its main priorities as an EU member

⁸ President of Bulgaria Georgi Parvanov “Bulgaria na praga na Evropeiskia sajuz” (“Bulgaria at the doorstep of the EU”) lecture at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 24.02.2006, Berlin, available at: <http://www.president.bg> , (accessed on: 20.09.2006).

⁹ “Impact Analysis...”, p. 3

¹⁰ “Impact Analysis...”, p.5

¹¹ Interview with Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ivailo Kalfin for Na chetiri ochi (Face to face) - Nova Televizia political program on 26.02.2006, available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg> (accessed at: 16.09.2006).

state: either by following the example of other EU member states (such as Portugal and Ireland), or by trying to find out its own path of economic development.¹²

Regional benefits

Democratic political systems in the countries from the Balkan region are still weak and in the process of consolidation. Bulgarian and Romanian EU membership could have a strong positive impact on political stabilization and economic development in the whole Balkan region. In this way future membership is able to serve as an additional stimulus for countries like Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia to continue with democratic reforms, and to keep the pace of their reformist agenda if the EU guarantees to these countries a membership perspective. The forthcoming accession will serve as a positive political signal for the other countries from the region, informing them, that their commitment to democracy will be appreciated. “The [...] membership of Bulgaria would undoubtedly strengthen Bulgaria’s regional profile and influence, and would strengthen the position of non-extremist, pro-European forces and social groups in Southeast Europe.”¹³

Political costs

Bulgaria’s EU membership is a political project that enjoys a very high level of support both from the representatives of political elite (government and opposition) and from Bulgarian citizens. Membership could have some negative effects on political life in terms of possible difficulties facing the country in the post-accession period. An eventual failure in the efforts of Bulgarian politicians to finalize successfully reforms in areas such as justice and home affairs and public administration reform, as well as a failure to profit both politically and economically from membership opportunities could have a very negative impact on the sentiments of the Bulgarian public towards the integration process. As a result accession could turn into a shock¹⁴ and not a success. This could strengthen the lack of trust towards the capacity of the political establishment to transform the country and eventually, will give rise

¹² Lecture of the Bulgarian European Affairs Minister Meglena Kuneva at the Sixth round table meeting with the Bulgarian Government organized by “The Economist”, 23.03.2006, available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg> (accessed at: 12.09.2006).

¹³ “Impact Analysis...”, p.6

¹⁴ A word used by the Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov, describing the negative impact of the post-accession period in a lecture at a conference “Bulgaria – chlen na ES ot 01.01.2007. Predizvikatelstvata na novija den” (Bulgaria – an EU membership from 01.01.2007. The new day challenges), available at: <http://www.president.bg> (accessed at: 20.09.2006).

to already existing anti-establishment sentiments. A natural result may be rise in eurosceptic views and the strengthening of eurosceptic party/parties trying to “free ride” on these moods and use them for political purposes.

Economic costs

In economic terms the costs of membership could be identified in four main areas.¹⁵ First, there is a broadly shared expectation among Bulgarian citizens that membership will result in a visible rise in the cost of living. Second, a great part of Bulgarian small and medium-sized entrepreneurs fear that new EU standards and powerful foreign companies will create extremely strong competition pressure in the new economic environment and Bulgarian SMEs will not be able to survive. As a result a great deal of SMEs in Bulgaria may go bankrupt and the level of unemployment may rise dramatically. Third, there are fears that accession will cause a shortage of qualified labour, as there will be many Bulgarian workers striving for better job opportunities in the economically developed EU member states – a process that will negatively impact the booming Bulgarian industry. Fourth, there are apprehensions about a possible failure of the Bulgarian public administration and business to utilize EU funds in a successful way. Such a failure could have very negative economic and social consequences for the Bulgarian economic development. It is interesting to note that there are different expected percentages of utilization of these funds, which clearly indicates the absence of a common concept for the strategy to be used for the absorption of funds. In a TV interview the Bulgarian Foreign Minister supposed that Bulgaria will have the same percentage as other newly acceded countries immediately after accession, i.e. about 35%¹⁶, while a Bulgarian economist recently optimistically presumed that in the first years of Bulgarian membership the absorption capacity will be at about 70-80%¹⁷.

¹⁵ These four aspects are presented in a concentrated way in the lecture of the Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov describing the negative impact of the post-accession period in a lecture at a conference “Bulgaria – chlen na ES ot 01.01.2007. Predizvikatelstvata na novija den” (Bulgaria – an EU membership from 01.01.2007. The new day challenges), available at: <http://www.president.bg>, (accessed at: 20.09.2006).

¹⁶ Interview with Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ivailo Kalfin for Na chetiri ochi (Face to face) - Nova Televizia (New Television) political program on 26.02.2006, available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg>, (accessed at: 16.09.2006).

¹⁷ Mladenova, Adriana, “Usvojavaneto na fondovete i riskovete za Balgaria” (“The funds use and risks for Bulgaria”), article in online monthly journal Politiki, available at www.politiki.bg, (accessed at: 18.09.2006).

In fact the absorption of the EU funds in the Bulgarian case could proceed at a much lower rate because of the lack of educated administration able to manage the inflow of EU finances.

Regional costs

As countries with economic and social characteristics more or less comparable to those of the rest of the Balkan countries, it could be expected that the first steps of Romania and Bulgaria in the EU will be followed closely by both political elites and the broad public in the whole region. Therefore, a failure of Romania and Bulgaria to adapt politically, economically and socially to the EU is able to influence negatively public attitudes of other Balkan countries towards joining the Union, as well as public support for deepening democratic reforms in these states.

Opinion polls

According to a sociological survey conducted in the beginning of this year (March 2006) 66% of Bulgarians support the country's accession to the EU. Most favourable to accession are citizens in big cities, between 30 and 40 years of age and with university education background¹⁸. Another poll, issued mid-May 2006 indicates that people supporting the future Bulgarian EU membership represent 69% of all Bulgarian citizens, while 71% of the respondents have positive attitudes towards EU. This survey shows that the level of trust of Bulgarian citizens towards EU institutions and the EU as a whole is much higher than their trust in Bulgarian institutions. The above mentioned survey also indicates the three strongest positive effects of integration, as indicated by the participating respondents. First, 36% of the answers list the opportunities for better living standards that will be utilized by the younger Bulgarian generations in the near future. Second, there is the broadly shared expectation (among 34% of respondents) that the integration process will lead to imposing EU rules and standards in Bulgaria. Another 34% of respondents place on third place the free movement of persons and better job opportunities.

¹⁸ Survey of March 2006 conducted by NCIOM published in Dnevnik.bg, "Traen spad na optimizma sred balgarite otchita prouchvane na NCIOM" ("Continuing decline in optimism among Bulgarians – according to NCIOM survey") on 29.03.2006, source: <http://evropa.dnevnik.bg>, (accessed at: 11.09.2006).

There are negative effects as well. The first of these is the rise of prices after accession (68%). Second, according to 45% of the respondents, are the expected bankrupts of Bulgarian companies. On third place, 22% of the interviewees, place the rise of the unemployment rate. About 31% of respondents believe that accession will have a negative impact on them afterwards. These fears are spread mainly between people with low educational background, above 45 years of age and living in small Bulgarian towns¹⁹.

Another opinion poll, again implemented in May, confirms the existence of this perception among Bulgarian citizens. According to this survey 30% of the respondents believe that the accession of Bulgaria to the EU will have a negative impact on the country, and almost the same percentage (31%) expect that they will endure personal loss due to accession²⁰.

On the basis of these poll results we could conclude that with the approaching membership the “Dream Europe” disappears and part of Bulgarian citizens start to demonstrate reluctance, fears and uncertainty concerning the possible costs/benefits of membership.

3. Looking around in the EU and its member states, who are the actors that are considered to play a leading role?

Taking into account the actual status of Bulgaria as an acceding country, we can identify two types of political actors in the Bulgarian public debate who are considered to play a leading role in the EU. First, all political positions, statements, and initiatives of the European Commission, and in particular it’s President Jose Baroso, have received significant attention in the media. The other member of the Commission who is considered as a figure with strong political influence within the EU is the Commissioner on Enlargement Oli Rehn. Another EU institution which enjoys particular media coverage is the European Parliament (EP). Despite the fact that the specific position of this institution within the EU institutional framework is underestimated by the broad public in Bulgaria, public opinion has started to appreciate the importance of the EP for Bulgaria’s accession goals. This tendency has resulted from the

¹⁹ Survey of 16-21 May 2006, conducted by ALPHA Research agency, “Obshtestvenoto mnenie za prisaedinjavaneto na Balgaria kam ES i gotovnoshta na stranata za chlenstvo” (“Public opinion for the Bulgarian accession to EU, and the readiness of the country for a membership”) published at 31.05.2006. available at: <http://www.aresearch.org> ,(accessed at: 13.09.2006).

²⁰ Survey of 04-09 May 2006, conducted by ASSA-M, published in Dnevnik.bg, “Evroskeptizmat sred Balgarite raste” (“Eurosepticism among Bulgarians is rising “) on 25.05.2006, source: <http://www.evropa.dnevnik.bg> (accessed on: 11.09.2006).

participation of Bulgarian observers in the work of the EP. Commentaries made by the Bulgarian EP observers concerning different issues of the future EU membership of Bulgaria are often presented in the media. Thus, the public activity of these observers contributes to a higher popularity of the EP in Bulgaria. As a result, Bulgarian media and public opinion follow closely debates in the EP, especially those having connection with Bulgarian accession.

The second group of political players having strong impact on EU development in the eyes of Bulgarian media and politicians are some of the big EU member states like Germany, France, United Kingdom and their political leaders – presidents and prime ministers. Germany has traditionally been considered by Bulgarian media and politicians as one of the leading member states in the Union. This specific position of Germany was strongly emphasized in a recent interview of the Bulgarian European Affairs Minister – Meglena Kuneva - who described Germany as a member state with a very strong influence, “huge potential and specific responsibilities”²¹ within the EU. Due to strong cultural and political ties with Bulgaria, France is another EU country with particular place on the pages of Bulgarian newspapers. Traditionally this country has been considered by Bulgarian public opinion as a very influential EU member state. However, as a result of the last French presidential elections, the French “no” to the EU Constitution project, ethnic revolts in Paris in the autumn of 2005, and especially the student-government conflict provoked by the first employment law enacted by the Villepin government, France has been described in the Bulgarian media as the “sick man of Europe”²². Curiously, analogous rhetoric has been used by the western European media to describe the problems of the 19th century Ottoman Empire, related to the need to implement radical modernization reforms.

The obvious lack of a common EU political project is still underestimated both by both the Bulgarian political and economic elites and society. This issue will most probably find its place in the Bulgarian media several months after accession of Bulgaria to the EU.

²¹ Interview with Bulgarian European Affairs Minister Meglena Kuneva, radio Deutsche Welle, 17 March 2006, available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg>, (accessed at: 12.09.2006).

²² Nikolov, Vladi; “Franzia-bolniat chovek na Evropa?” (“France-the sick man of Europe?”); article in Dnevnik.bg, available at: <http://www.evropa.dnevnik.bg>, (accessed on: 22. 09. 2006).

4. Which discourses on political and societal issues in other member states and/or neighboring countries are given particular attention to and are covered in the media?

The main media interest in Bulgaria is currently concentrated predominantly on the future EU accession of the country, and all topics concerning the accession process receive significant media coverage. For example, articles, related to the political, economic and social situation in the other currently acceding country – Romania, could be found very often in Bulgarian media. These articles contain two easily discernable journalistic approaches to the neighboring country. According to the first one the accession process of Bulgaria is often compared to that in Romania, and it is not infrequent that Rumanian success stories in areas such as fight against high level corruption and organized crime are pointed out as a positive example to be followed by Bulgarian politicians, public administration and society. The other journalistic approach concentrates its attention predominantly on unsuccessful steps of Romania towards the EU and often speculates about possible negative implications which Romanian failures could have for the Bulgarian accession process.

Another very important topic enjoying the attention of Bulgarian media concerns the relationships between some of EU member states, especially Germany and France, and countries from the Western Balkans. Bulgarian public opinion also follows closely the development of such relationships as: the initiated accession negotiations with Croatia and Turkey, the EU candidacy status of the Republic of Macedonia, political developments concerning Serbia's EU membership prospects. The independence of Montenegro has also been regarded as an important media issue, which received significant media attention.

Being very sensitive in general to the relationships between the EU and Libya, the Bulgarian public has paid specific attention to every development in these relationships in the January-May 2006 period. This is due to the specific interest Bulgaria has in Libya in view of the lasting seven-year process against the Bulgarian nurses who were blamed to have infected hundreds of Libyan children with HIV/AIDS while working in a Libyan hospital.. The Bulgarian government and public opinion follow very closely the judicial activities of the Tribunal and all EU political attempts to resolve this case.

Avian flu in Turkey and Romania was another topic that received broad coverage in the Bulgarian media during the first half of the year. The location of these two countries in the close Bulgarian neighborhood raised a lot of fears about the possible spread of the infection in Bulgaria, and the negative consequences that the infection could have for the Bulgarian food industry, as well as, the forthcoming summer tourist season.

Another broadly covered media topic was the development of the EU-Russia relations concerning the energy supply for the economies of the EU member states economies and the possible effects this talks could have on the development of the Bulgarian energy strategy development.

Bulgarian Accession Treaty ratification process in EU member states and particularly in Germany and France has also been one of the topics which have received their place in the Bulgarian electronic and printed media during the January-May 2006 period.

5. What are the reactions to the publication of the Lisbon ranking in your country?

Neither Bulgarian political discourse nor the academic one paid a particular attention to the publication of the Lisbon ranking. Even more the actual state of the public debate on the Lisbon agenda in Bulgaria is characterized by vague political declarations, and very low level of media interest to the issue. According to the Bulgarian European Affaires Minister Meglena Kuneva, Bulgaria has to make a decision on its economic and social priorities and to base its investment strategy on these priorities²³. In this respect she points out five priorities in which Bulgaria has to concentrate its investments for the period 2007-2013: transport infrastructure and environment, Bulgarian labour market development, business environment development, strengthening of the administrative capacity, sustainable development of Bulgarian regions²⁴.

²³ Lecture of the Bulgarian European Affaires Minister Meglena Kuneva at the Sixth round table meeting with the Bulgarian Government organized by "The Economist", 23.03.2006, available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg> (accessed at: 12.09.2006).

²⁴ Ibidem.

At the same time, during a conference statement, Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov has expressed fears that the Bulgarian understanding of the Lisbon Agenda is to some degree not adequate, and formal²⁵.

6. Which future for the Western Balkans and EU-Enlargement?

Bulgaria and Romania will be EU members after several months. The question what should be the Western Balkan states future emerges in a new perspective. As Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ivailo Kalfin declared the Balkan region is an area of “high priority” for Bulgarian foreign policy²⁶. On this basis, Bulgaria pays particular attention to the development of political relations between the EU, NATO and the Western Balkans countries. The integration of this region within NATO is politically interpreted as a step towards following integration within the EU – these are two interdependent processes from a Bulgarian foreign policy perspective. At the same time, this “high priority” status given to the region by Bulgarian diplomacy prescribes the existence of a high degree of co-ordination between foreign policy initiatives of the Bulgarian President, Prime-minister, and Foreign minister. The latter could be observed if we pay attention to their statements, foreign policy initiatives and projects concerning the future of the Western Balkan states. According to the three leading political figures in Bulgarian foreign policy, the enlargement process in general and the future accession of Western Balkan countries in particular are “not questioned”²⁷. If the EU wants to reach a long-term stabilization on the Balkans and guarantee peace and prosperity for the whole region, it has to give to the Balkan states a clear “EU perspective”²⁸. In its foreign policy statements Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov insists that the Balkans are an integral part of Europe, therefore, they have to be part of EU enlargement efforts as well. According to him, the first integration step has to be in the area of building a new regional infrastructure, and the second step envisages the transformation of the whole Balkan region into a free trade area, which would stimulate the acceleration of the economic and social development of the

²⁵ Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov, “Bulgaria – chlen na ES ot 01.01.2007. Predizvikatelstvata na novija den” (Bulgaria – an EU membership from 01.01.2007. The new day challenges), available at: <http://www.president.bg>, (accessed at: 20.09.2006).

²⁶ Press conference of Bulgarian Foreign Affairs Minister Ivailo Kalfin, 13.01.2006, available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg>, (accessed at: 15.09.2006).

²⁷ “Razshirjavaneto na ES ne se postavja pod vapors” (“The EU enlargement is not questioned”) Interview with Bulgarian Prime-minister Sergei Stanishev for “The New Anatolian”, 18.01.2006, available at: <http://www.government.bg>, (accessed at: 01.10.2006).

²⁸ “Balgaria – stabilizirasht faktor v Jugoiztochna Evropa” (“Bulgaria – stabilizing factor in the South Eastern Europe”), speech of the Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov South Eastern Europe Society, 25.02.2006, Erfurt, available at: <http://www.president.bg>, (accessed at: 15.09.2006).

Western Balkan countries²⁹. Bulgaria's President proposes that the EU accession negotiations formula "screening – negotiations – monitoring" has to be applied towards the Western Balkans countries, with a clear EU perspective at the end of the process³⁰. In accordance with this view is the position of the Bulgarian Foreign minister who states that "the main goal of South East European countries rests with the accelerated realization of the region's European perspective. In 2005 each of these countries made an important step ahead towards EU membership. The decision to start accession talks with Croatia and Turkey is definitely a success for the region. It goes on with the EU candidacy status given to the Republic of Macedonia, and the start of Stabilization and Association negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro, as well as the strong perspectives for concluding these talks with Albania and the rest of the countries this year."³¹ Ivailo Kalfin does not support political opinions shared between some influential EU political figures that the rest of the Western Balkan countries (standing in line after Croatia) should be guaranteed only an associate members status. In his opinion, it will be a mistake to leave out the ex-Yugoslav countries without any chance to integrate in the EU in the future regardless of the political and economic reforms in these countries³².

EU membership for the entire Balkan region will have a positive effect for the EU as a whole, and vice versa, EU failure on the Balkans will bring about a strongly negative impact on the EU project. "Any failure of the EU to bring stability and development to the Balkans will not simply increase the import of immigrants and criminality in the member states but will delegitimize the Europe project. It is in the Balkans that the EU should either demonstrate that its transformative power can work in regions where states are weak and societies are divided or it will sink into irrelevance. Because of the scale and the nature of its involvement the Balkans is the make-or-break test for the union. The EU can survive the premature death of its constitution but the EU cannot survive a new Srebrenica."³³ As a result of the accession of

²⁹ Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov at a High level meeting about the Balkan economics and tourism, 28.04.2006, Duras, available at: <http://www.president.bg>, (accessed at: 15. 09.2006)

³⁰ "Evropeiskata perspektiva na Balkanite" ("Balkans European perspective"), lecture of the Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov Foreign policy Denmark society, 29.03.2006, Copenhagen, available at: <http://www.president.bg>, (accessed at: 15.09.2006).

³¹ Statement by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivailo Kalfin, SEEC- Ministers' of Foreign Affairs Summit, 24.01.2006, Athens, available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg>, (accessed at: 17.09.2006).

³² Interview with Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ivailo Kalfin for "Die Welt", 08.02.2006, available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg>, (accessed at: 17.09.2006).

³³ Krastev, Ivan, "European Union and the Balkans: enlargement or empire?", available at: <http://www.gmfus.org/doc/Krastev%20Paper.pdf>, (accessed at: 15. 09.2006).

other Balkan states, the EU will have the opportunity to concentrate more attention on its internal problems, to be less concerned with regional security at its borders, to pay less for its army groups in Western Balkans, to guarantee a market with almost 100 billion consumers and to take part in huge infrastructure and economic projects³⁴. The successful EU integration of Western Balkan countries will have a strong impact on Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova supporting the deepening of democratic and economic transformations within these countries³⁵.

Status of Kosovo and Montenegro

The guiding rule of all Bulgarian Foreign Policy initiatives concerning Kosovo is that Pristina and Belgrade are the main political actors within this conflict and the successful solution lies in their hands. According to the Bulgarian Foreign Minister, the resolution of the Kosovo problem is meant “not to destabilize but to stabilize the whole region”³⁶. In this direction are Bulgarian foreign policy activities to try to stimulate dialogue between these two actors and to guarantee expertise and support to both sides³⁷. Bulgaria will accept and support the solution that is the result of a Pristina-Belgrade dialogue and that doesn't put the EU perspective of the region in danger³⁸.

The Bulgarian position on the independence referendum in Montenegro is in harmony with the common European position, which states that the referendum result will be accepted only if all international norms are respected during the whole referendum process.³⁹

Turkey and EU

³⁴ Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov at the 13th Central European Heads of States meeting, 19.05.2006, Varna, available at: <http://www.president.bg>, (accessed at: 20.09.2006).

President of Bulgaria Georgi Parvanov, “Balgaria na praga na Evropeiskia sajuz” (“Bulgaria at the doorstep of the EU”), lecture at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 24.02.2006, Berlin, available at: <http://www.president.bg>, (accessed at: 20.09.2006).

³⁵ “Evropeiskata perspektiva na Balkanite” (“Balkans European perspective”), lecture of the Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov at the Foreign policy Denmark society, 29.03.2006, Copenhagen, available at: <http://www.president.bg>, (accessed at: 15.09.2006).

³⁶ Press conference of Bulgarian Foreign Affairs Minister Ivailo Kalfin, 13.01.2006, available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg>, (accessed at: 15.09.2006).

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ “Razshirjavaneto na ES ne se postavja pod vapors” (“The EU enlargement is not questioned”) Interview with Bulgarian Prime-minister Sergei Stanishev for “The New Anatolian”, 18.01.2006, available at: <http://www.government.bg>, (accessed at: 01.10.2006).

³⁹ Press conference of Bulgarian Foreign Affairs Minister Ivailo Kalfin, 13.01.2006, available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg>, (accessed at: 15.09.2006).

There are different political positions, expressed by government and party leaders, concerning the perspective of Turkey's EU membership. The position of the Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov about the start of accession negotiation talks between EU and Turkey is that Turkish membership in the EU will have a positive impact on Bulgaria's and South Eastern Europe's regional security. Meanwhile he points out that Turkey has to pass a very lengthy and difficult transformation process aimed to meet the political, social and economic EU criteria⁴⁰.

A different point of view was expressed in a declaration of the Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (DSB) party. DSB insists on the approval of Turkey's EU membership by referendum⁴¹. Some fears about the possible negative results from Turkey EU accession for Bulgaria are expressed also by Bulgarian political analyst Ognyan Minchev who is particularly afraid by the huge demographic misbalance existing between Bulgaria and Turkey, as well from the role of the ethnic Turkish party Movements for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) in Bulgarian political and social life⁴². He states that if the accession of Turkey is not the result of deep internal state and social reforms but a political compromise of the part of the EU, then "the EU will cease to exist in its former status of a project for economic, social, political and cultural integration of Europe and will be reduced to the status of a customs union, free trade area, upgraded with a certain amount of common commercial regulation, administration, and – perhaps – (for most members) single currency."⁴³ According to him, Turkey could become an EU member state only after "deep and principled transformation of the Turkish state and society, and adaptation to European standards of social, economic, and political life."⁴⁴

Positions outlined above reveal the absence of a common political and social consensus about the future status of Turkey.

7. Which future for the Greater Middle East?

⁴⁰ "Evropeiskata perspektiva na Balkanite" ("Balkans European perspective"), lecture of the Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov Foreign policy Denmark society, 29.03.2006, Copenhagen, available at: <http://www.president.bg> ,(accessed at: 15.09.2006).

⁴¹ Pozizia na Demokrati za Silna Balgaria otosno pregovorite na Turzia za chlenstvo v ES (Position of Democrats for Strong Bulgaria about Turkish negotiation for EU membership), available at: www.dsb.bg ,(accessed at: 06.10.2006).

⁴² Minchev, Ognyan, "The Case of Turkey in the EU", available at: <http://www.iris-bg.org> ,(accessed at: 06.10.2006).

⁴³ Minchev..., p. 6.

⁴⁴ Minchev..., p. 9.

Iran/Middle East

Iran and Middle East problems are not topics that have enjoyed particular media coverage during the January-May 2006 period. Bulgarian media prefer only to transmit news coming from these conflict regions without broad commentaries and deep political analysis. In both conflicts the USA is represented as the main foreign factor which could provoke the necessary political compromises for peace and stability in the envisaged regions. The role of the EU is described within the rhetoric of the “soft power”, without the potential to resolve the existing conflicts alone. The Bulgarian government position is carefully balanced and in accordance with the EU position as a whole.

Energy security

Since gas supplies from Russia represent 100% of Bulgarian gas consumption⁴⁵, both Bulgarian politicians and broad public followed closely the “gas war” between Russia and Ukraine at the beginning of 2006. Parties within the Bulgarian coalition government share a high degree of agreement on the future steps of Bulgarian energy policy. Both Foreign Affairs Minister and European Affairs Minister insist strongly on the necessity to establish a common EU energy policy⁴⁶. Bulgarian European Affairs Minister Meglena Kuneva expressed her view about the crucial need for both the EU and Bulgaria to reduce their energy supply dependence from Russia by looking for more differentiated energy suppliers scheme, trying to develop its own energy resources such as wind power and biomass. Even more, in her view, EU energy policy has to be regarded as an integral part of the EU’s CFSP, which means that the EU has to maintain close contacts not only with Russia but with other strategic energy suppliers. This policy has to guarantee three “strategic goals of the European energy policy”: supply security, concurrence, and sustainable development⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ Interview with Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ivailo Kalfin for “V desetkata” () – BTV commentary program on 30.04.2006, available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg> ,(accessed at: 16.09.2006).

⁴⁶ Interview with Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ivailo Kalfin for “V desetkata” () – BTV commentary program on 30.04.2006, available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg> ,(accessed at: 16.09.2006).

Lecture of the Bulgarian European Affaires Minister Meglena Kuneva at the Sixth round table meeting with the Bulgarian Government organized by “The Economist”, 23.03.2006, available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg> (accessed at: 12.09.2006).

⁴⁷ Lecture of the Bulgarian European Affaires Minister Meglena Kuneva at the Sixth round table meeting with the Bulgarian Government organized by “The Economist”, 23.03.2006, available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg> (accessed at: 12.09.2006).

8. Upcoming issues and events in your country

At this moment, in the middle of 2006, just several months before the accession, EU impact over the Bulgarian policy agenda is extremely strong. The main priority of the Bulgarian coalition government and public administration until the end of the year 2006 is the accomplishment of several tasks related to a successful Bulgarian EU membership. These tasks have been provoked to a large extent by the last European Commission monitoring report (May 2006) and concern reforms in the areas of justice and home affairs, public administration reform and agriculture as well as applying measures against the corruption at the higher levels.

Another top priority issue is the presidential elections in October 2006, which could have an impact on the party scene but will hardly influence the perspective of Bulgaria's accession policy. On the other hand, the final Monitoring report of the European Commission, determining the accession date of Bulgaria, is expected in September. This report is able to play a very important role during the presidential electoral campaign and could have a strong impact on the final election results.

We could develop several scenarios about the impact of the European Commission's autumn report on the outcome of presidential elections but if we try to summarize them we will be able to outline two main options corresponding to different levels of impact on elections. Option one: a relatively positive monitoring report and date of accession on 1 January 2007. In this case it is reasonable to expect a relatively calm election campaign and second presidential mandate for the President in charge – Georgi Parvanov. Option two: A strongly negative EU Commission report, and the postponement of Bulgarian accession by one year (until 1 January 2008). In this case it will be very difficult for the outgoing president to convince the electorate in the positive effects of his presidential mandate, and Bulgaria could have a new President at the end of the year. On the basis of the broad political consensus about Bulgaria's EU membership, it is highly unlikely that the results of the presidential elections will provoke a shift in the Bulgarian attitude towards the EU direction of the country.

The context of the coming accession is also a background for the efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of European Affairs to secure smooth and successful ratification of the Bulgarian Accession Treaty paying particular attention to a successful completion of the German and French ratification procedures in the late autumn of 2006.

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