



**“EU-CONSENT”**  
**WIDER EUROPE,**  
**DEEPER INTEGRATION?**  
**CONSTRUCTING EUROPE**  
**NETWORK**



EU-25 Watch No 4

**NATIONAL COUNTRY REPORT – BULGARIA**

**1. Expectations for the German Presidency**

Bulgaria’s expected accession to the EU was the dominant media topic in the country throughout 2006. Although the EU as a whole was largely present and highly visible in the Bulgarian public debate, it was mainly perceived as a point of reference to the different social and political reforms occurring in Bulgaria during the pre-accession process. In accordance with this “accession logic”, the EU institution that dominated Bulgarian media in June-November 2006 was the European Commission. All other EU institutions, including the European Council, received considerably less attention.

The above context can help understand the lack of media coverage concerning the future German EU Presidency. There are also other explanations for the lack of media attention towards the preparation for and expectations from the forthcoming German EU Presidency.

- First, Bulgarian foreign policy has been traditionally perceived as one tending to follow already established agendas rather than contributing to the formulation of such agendas. In this case, too, one can observe a re-active rather than a pro-active foreign policy making pattern. The Bulgarian “political horizon” is quite low and dictates the predominance of short-term preoccupations. It is connected with spending political resources and capital on immediate achievements, sometimes to the detriment of strategic interests or visions. Even in cases where long-term political vision is demonstrated, it normally has two characteristics. On one hand, again, such a vision is careful not to deviate too much from

the “mainstream”, or in other words, it is “suiviste” (in the words of the late Francois Mitterrand). On the other hand, it is mostly a sort of a declaratory activism, which stops short of producing concrete foreign policy deliverables. This line of argument can be illustrated by several interviews<sup>1</sup> of the Bulgarian Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev given in the autumn of 2006. There, Stanishev demonstrated political vision, stating that Bulgaria needs “a strong, integrated EU, integrating more common policies, which has the capacity to be a global competitor in the world”<sup>2</sup>. The above features are explainable also by a relatively modest expert and institutional capacity in Bulgaria’s foreign policy making field that are difficult to overcome but in a long-term framework.

- The second explanation for the lack of explicit positions on the future German Presidency is status-related. In June-November 2006 Bulgaria was still an acceding country, with its Accession Treaty pending the completion of the ratification procedure. The Bulgarian government has preferred to concentrate its political activity on a two-fold short-term goal – achieving successful ratification and “doing the internal policy homework” that is a *sine qua non* for ratification (reforms in the specific fields criticized by the Commission). On a more specific level, Germany was almost the only country to be feared by Bulgaria as a possible “trouble-maker” during the Accession Treaty’s ratification procedure. The Bulgarian government focused its attention on the ratification procedure, instead of trying to lobby the German government in favour of not-yet-defined Bulgarian post-accession priorities.

Despite the above mentioned factors hampering the formulation by Bulgarian foreign policy of clear-cut and explicit expectations from the 2007 German Presidency of the EU, we can try – on the basis of expressed Bulgarian interests – to point out several EU policy priorities that Bulgaria will possibly support during the term of the German Presidency.

- First comes the expected formulation of a common EU position on the increasing EU energy supply dependency from Russia. Bulgaria being a country with a very high degree

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<sup>1</sup> (1) Bulgarian Prime Minister Statement on the Conference “60 dni predi ES: kakvo da ochaskvame, kakvo da pravim” (“60 days before EU: What can we expect, what can we do.”); available at: <http://www.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Government); accessed on 27.10.2006. (Translation of quotes here and further below in the Bulgarian country report are done by Dragomir Stoyanov). (2) Joint Press-conference of Bulgarian Prime Minister, Mr. Sergei Stanishev, EU Commission President, Mr. Jose Manuel Barroso, and EU Enlargement Commissioner, Mr. Oli Rehn; 27.09.2006; available at: <http://www.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Government); accessed on 27.10.2006. (3) Press-conference of Bulgarian Prime Minister, Mr. Sergei Stanishev, and Hungarian Prime Minister, Mr. Ferenc Gyurcsany; 25.08.2006; available at: <http://www.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Government); accessed on 27.10.2006.

<sup>2</sup> Bulgarian Prime Minister Statement on the Conference “60 dni predi ES:...”

of energy dependency, the expected elaboration of a common EU energy policy is supported by both political elite and public opinion in Bulgaria.

- The next priority whose implementation should be carried out with perseverance by the German Presidency is the further development of the enlargement process, guaranteeing an explicit EU perspective for the Western Balkan countries.
- Intensification and substantiation of the European Neighbourhood Policy, especially in its Eastern dimension and its Black Sea dimension, should be placed high on the EU's foreign policy agenda by the office of Germany during its EU Presidency.
- Another priority should be the reactivation of the EU Constitutional debate considering the existing necessity within the Union for a more efficient institutional structure, which would correspond with the increasing EU citizens' expectations at both the political and economic level.

## **2. Elements for the “Rome Declaration 2007”**

In the autumn of 2006, there is practically no debate in Bulgaria on the elements of a future “Rome Declaration” (declaration on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signature of the Rome Treaties). However, here we can provide some suggestions concerning the necessary elements that should be included in such a declaration.

Although dealing with various economic sectors at the initial stages of its community development, the EU has been, throughout its history, a joint democracy building exercise – first in the defeated Western Germany and Italy shattered by the devastation of authoritarian regimes, then in the Southern European countries (Greece, Portugal, Spain) where another generation of authoritarian regimes had been overthrown, and, in the end, in the “new” EU member states that have “come in from the totalitarian cold” in 2004-2007. The Community/Union was launched essentially as a political project having at its core basic principles of democracy, such as freedom of speech, free elections, and freedom of establishing political and social institutions. The emergence of and support for civil society development have resulted in building an environment of open access to social and human rights. Thus the EU was/is not simply a common economic space but “a community of values

and politicians have to explain that to their people.”<sup>3</sup> These values have been a guiding light for all ex-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe during their long transition period. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary declaration should confirm these EU values and give a clear sign that future EU development is strongly connected with respect for these common political and social values. Also, the Union should keep promoting them in its neighborhood policy. This will provide the Union with the opportunity to develop its institutions and policies while not neglecting its duties to other European countries that are still not among its member states.

Another element of this Rome Declaration should be the devotedness of the EU to the stabilization and reforming processes in the countries from the Western Balkans and Turkey. The EU can guarantee peace and stability in the Balkans only by assuring a clear integration perspective for the Western Balkans. The latter can be used as a tool for strengthening the development of the democratic order and the protection of human rights in these countries.

The third element of this Declaration should include considerations about the political development of the EU, and the so called “democratic deficit”. It is important that the leaders of EU member states to address a strong signal towards EU citizens that there is the political will on the part of the political elite to overcome the existing gap between citizens and EU institutions.

In sum, the above constitute a plea for the further development of the EU as a coherent democracy building endeavour (a) with a view to consolidating democracy inside the EU member states in order to withstand the ever growing temptations of populism contaminating “new” and “old” EU members alike, (b) with a due account of the urgent demand for a self-reflection about democracy at EU level and linkage with EU citizens, and (c) with the mission to project democracy in the immediate EU neighbourhood (in South Eastern Europe and in Eastern Europe).

Last but not least, the Rome Declaration 2007 should demonstrate a clear political vision about future EU development. A strongly shared common vision about the future of the EU is unlikely at the moment. Some degree of consensus is however needed if we want the EU not

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Bulgarian Prime Minister, Mr. Sergei Stanishev, for “La Croix”; 17.10.2006; available at: <http://www.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Government); accessed on 27.10.2006.

to “freeze” in the labyrinth of unsolved problems after the last enlargement. The EU needs dynamism and the forthcoming 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary Declaration can provide it.

### 3. Scenarios

Bulgarian politicians and experts were part of the European Convention and more or less actively participated in the process of elaboration of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe. However, the Constitutional Treaty has not become a substantial part of the broad Bulgarian public debate; it has remained locked behind the doors of universities and other academic institutions.<sup>4</sup> The long process of ratifications and member states’ referenda was regarded in Bulgaria as something distant and not in direct relation with the country’s political development. We can nevertheless try to analyze the existing scenarios for a future EU Constitution on the basis of some rare publicly expressed arguments delivered by the Bulgarian Minister of European Affairs Meglena Kuneva and some scholars.

If we follow the arguments expressed during the EU Constitutional debate in the member states, we can outline three distinct scenarios: continuation of the ratification process, a “mini-treaty” adoption, or the elaboration of a completely new Constitutional Treaty text.

Lots of considerations were expressed during the whole European Convention process and ratification period about the name, composition, and content of the proposed Constitutional Treaty. The long and difficult ratification process demonstrated that European citizens are not ready to support the proposed Constitutional document without reservations, although objections were rarely directed at the text proper. As a result, most of the EU member countries preferred not to use a referendum as a ratification tool but decided that the constitutional text shall be approved by national parliaments. Finally, the French and Dutch referenda results were a clear signal about the failure of the project. A continuation of the ratification process without paying attention to the above mentioned referenda results will put EU coherence into danger.

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<sup>4</sup> This observation was shared by the Bulgarian Minister of European Affairs, Ms. Meglena Kuneva, in an interview for the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR); Horizont; “Nedelja 150” (“Sunday 150”) program; 09.10.2006; available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs); accessed on 27.10.2006.

Following this logic, both the most probable and most desirable solution could be the composition of a “mini-treaty” containing two or three chapters, reaffirming the basic EU values and principles, and regulating in detail the EU institutional architecture. “The EU’s Constitution should include common principles, human rights and EU institutions, so people can understand it better.”<sup>5</sup> This “Constitution of values” has to underline the key elements lying at the foundation of the EU construction, illuminating EU guidelines, which are to be broadly debated among EU citizens: “A Constitution must outline several important consensual principles, which are possible to be apt to public debate.”<sup>6</sup>

The third scenario, called “Nice plus” can result from the “mini-treaty” scenario, and complete the “mini-treaty”, focusing its attention on EU policies and policy competencies. Thus, “Nice plus” can supplement the “Constitution of values” with a thorough description of EU policy issues.

In sum, whatever decision is taken by the EU member states’ governments, it is of crucial importance that this decision to be transparent, and that the proposed Constitutional Treaty text be open to public discussions before its ratification. This is able to contribute to achieve a high level of support both by the EU member states’ political elites and their citizens.

#### **4. Absorption capacity**

In an interview for EurActive, the European People’s Party MEP, Alexander Stubb, describes EU “absorption capacity” as a term composed of three aspects: “My argument is that the Union needs to be ready for each enlargement on three accounts: institutions, budget and policies. If it passes the litmus test on all of these, then the Union is ready to enlarge. It is important to stress that integration capacity is the responsibility of the current member states, not the applicant countries.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bulgarian Minister of European Affairs, Ms. Meglena Kuneva; 19.10.2006; available at: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/constitution/duff-plan-rescue-constitution/article-158933> ; accessed on 05.11.2006.

<sup>6</sup> An intervention by Bulgarian scholar, Ivailo Ditchev, in an interview with Bulgarian Minister of European Affairs, Ms. Meglena Kuneva, for Bulgarian National Radio (BNR); Horizont; “Nedelja 150” (“Sunday 150”) program; 09.10.2006; available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs); accessed on 27.10.2006.

<sup>7</sup> European People’s Party MEP, Alexander Stubb, interview with EurActive.com; 20.10.2006; available at: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/interview-eu-integration-capacity/article-158959>; accessed on 28.10.2006.

The EU's "absorption capacity" has been broadly debated by the media in the EU member states during the second half of 2006, usually being interpreted as an additional obstacle to future Turkish EU membership – a "softer" tool than a referendum.

If we pay attention to the state of the enlargement debate in Bulgaria, two important aspects can be outlined.

- First, Bulgarian politicians support future steps in the process of strengthening the Union.<sup>8</sup> For example, in a recent interview, Ms. Meglena Kuneva, Minister of European Affairs, restated the institutional aspect of absorption capacity, which in her view is closely linked to the perspectives of future enlargement<sup>9</sup>. According to Ms. Kuneva, if the Union is more institutionally stable and "stronger inside"<sup>10</sup>, this will facilitate future enlargements and will provide for stronger support among EU citizens.
- Second, and most importantly, willingness for a stronger Union goes hand in hand with the need for the EU to continue the enlargement process that has already been launched. "In the past, the EU used to be linked with the idea of benefit. Today, it is perceived above all as a threat. Yet most of the things that make the European peoples feel insecure, for example unemployment, are not connected with enlargement. It is rather due to the fact that Europe has to face a lot of challenges in a world where competition is getting fiercer. Therefore, the only way for Europe to become strong is to enlarge. We should realize that enlargement offers a lot of opportunities."<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, it is necessary to outline that leading Bulgarian politicians (President, Prime Minister and Minister of European Affairs) support the widening of the Union, focusing particularly on Western Balkan countries<sup>12</sup>. According to a commonly shared belief, the

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<sup>8</sup> It is necessary to point out that the majority of leading Bulgarian politicians has not taken a substantial part in the EU policy making process and lack sufficient institutional experience. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate whether their political opinions about the EU's institutional setting are the result of their own observations or are influenced by those of their more experienced colleagues coming from EU member states. – note by Dragomir Stoyanov.

<sup>9</sup> An interview of Bulgarian Minister of European Affairs, Ms. Meglena Kuneva, with Bulgarian National Radio (BNR); Horizont; "Nedelja 150" ("Sunday 150") program; 09.10.2006; available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs); accessed on 27.10.2006.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> Interview of Bulgarian Prime Minister, Mr. Sergei Stanishev, with "La Croix"; "Old and New Europe Should Not Stand in Opposition"; 18.10.2006. available at: <http://www.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Government); accessed on 05.11.2006.

<sup>12</sup> Interview of Bulgarian President, Mr. Georgi Parvanov, with Euronews; 24.09.2006; available at: <http://www.president.bg/> (the official web site of the President of Bulgaria); accessed on 05.11.2006.

guarantee of a clear EU perspective to the Western Balkan states will contribute to peace, stability and prosperity not only for the Balkan region but for the European continent as a whole.

In the case of Turkey, the Bulgarian position can be summarized by the words of the Bulgarian Minister of European Affairs: “We support an entry of the country. We provide all the necessary changes in the country, which will bring the country to another stage, to the possibility to perform as a good negotiator and to succeed in this process. So, of course, as a neighbour, we really support the changes and the modernization of the country.”<sup>13</sup> At the same time, Bulgarian politicians have always emphasized that Turkish entry into EU has to be based on the fulfillment of all economic and political criteria set up by EU member states: “Since Turkey is a neighbouring country, of course we have an interest in seeing Turkey go along the European road and eventually, in the future, become a member. I hasten to add however that to achieve that, Turkey needs, as has been the case with all other countries aspiring for membership, to take the concrete and difficult steps necessary to meet all the economic, political and other criteria required by the EU.”<sup>14</sup>

## **5. European Energy Policy**

In a speech delivered in July 2006, Bulgarian Minister of Economy and Energy Rumen Ovcharov declared that Bulgarian energy security has never been only a Bulgarian issue. He stressed that about 60% of Bulgarian energy consumption has been secured by foreign suppliers during the last 50-60 years<sup>15</sup>. Such a high degree (60%) of foreign energy supply dependency is well known in Bulgaria. During the communist era Bulgaria was not only

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Press-conference of Bulgarian Prime Minister, Mr. Sergei Stanishev, and the Prime Minister of Denmark, Mr. Andres Fogh Rasmussen; 31.08.2006; available at: <http://www.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Government); accessed on 27.10.2006.

Interview of Minister of European Affairs, Ms. Meglena Kuneva, for “Alpbach News”; 29.08.2006; available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs); accessed on 05.11.2006.

<sup>13</sup> Interview of Minister of European Affairs, Ms. Meglena Kuneva, for “Alpbach News”; 29.08.2006; available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs); accessed on 05.11.2006.

<sup>14</sup> Interview of Bulgarian President, Mr. Georgi Parvanov, with Euronews; 24.09.2006; available at: <http://www.president.bg/> (the official web site of the President of Bulgaria); accessed on 05.11.2006.

<sup>15</sup> Speech of Bulgarian Minister of Economy and Energy, Mr. Rumen Ovcharov, at the conference “Bulgaria and Energy Security Policy”; organised by The Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS); 25.07.2006; Sofia; available at: <http://www.mi.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Ministry of Economy and Energy); accessed on 11.11.2006. Additional information about the expressed views at the Conference authors retrieved from the Conference minutes prepared by Mr. Plamen Ralchev, political analyst in IRIS.

politically but also economically dependent on the USSR, including in terms of energy supply. In the last ten years, economic and particularly energy relations between Bulgaria and Russia have received significant media attention in Bulgaria but have never become an integral part of a national security debate<sup>16</sup>. The security dimension of Bulgarian energy dependency has been very rarely debated within the Bulgarian public space. It has become a hot topic, though, after the start of the Ukraine-Russia gas war in January 2006, and the EU reaction to it. We could conclude, therefore, that the energy security debate was developed in Bulgaria as a result of the larger EU energy debate.

The Bulgarian Minister of Economy and Energy has expressed support for EU efforts for establishing of a common energy policy but has pointed out that, until now, these efforts have been fruitless, producing only declarations and statements with no real results<sup>17</sup>. As a result Russia is encircling Europe “step by step” on the basis of bilateral contracts and an “individual policy towards every single European state”<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, Minister Ovcharov has stressed that EU member states such as Hungary and the Czech Republic follow their own energy policy agendas by signing bilateral agreements with Russia without paying much attention to common EU efforts. As a result, Bulgaria has to decide its energy problems alone without the support of a common EU policy, which puts the country in a difficult situation in its negotiations with Russia<sup>19</sup>.

### *Energy Security and Diversification*

According to Minister Ovcharov, Bulgarian energy security has three important aspects: 1) Bulgaria as a future EU member state, 2) depolitization of the energy debate, 3) pragmatism<sup>20</sup>. In the public debate in late 2006, doubts have been expressed with regard to the practical realization of some of these aspects. In a commentary for Deutsche Welle Bulgarian journalist Georgi Papakochev indicated the lack of policy coherence in the energy

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<sup>16</sup> One of the explanations for energy security low salience is the influence of Russian energy lobby in Bulgaria not only at political and economic level but in media as well. – note of Dragomir Stoyanov

<sup>17</sup> Speech of Bulgarian Minister of Economy and Energy, Mr. Rumen Ovcharov, at the conference “Bulgaria and Energy Security...”

<sup>18</sup> Interview of Bulgarian Minister of Economy and Energy, Mr. Rumen Ovcharov, for newspaper “Duma”; 07.08.2006; available at: <http://www.mi.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Ministry of Economy and Energy); accessed on 11.11.2006.

<sup>19</sup> Speech of Bulgarian Minister of Economy and Energy, Mr. Rumen Ovcharov, at the conference “Bulgaria and Energy Security...”

<sup>20</sup> Speech of Bulgarian Minister of Economy and Energy, Mr. Rumen Ovcharov, at the conference “Bulgaria and Energy Security...”

sector, demonstrated by the Bulgarian government. As an example of this he has pointed out the divergence of positions of Bulgarian Prime Minister, Mr. Sergei Stanishev, who supported the NABUKO project, and the support expressed by the Bulgarian President about an alternative project named Burgas-Alexandroupolis<sup>21</sup>. In Papakochev's view, the latter project strengthens Russian positions on the Balkans. "With its almost full control on the future oil pipeline [Burgas-Alexandrupolis], the Kremlin will have the opportunity to influence directly the politics of two NATO states [Bulgaria and Greece], which after 1 January 2007 will be partners within the EU."<sup>22</sup>

The third aspect of Bulgarian energy security – "pragmatism" – is the usual key word used by Bulgarian politicians who are promoting the strengthening of Bulgarian government contacts with Russia. Using this "magic word" as one able to resolve existing problems between Bulgaria and Russia, some leading Bulgarian politicians insist that Bulgarian-Russian energy cooperation has only an economic dimension and not a political one. Such a "pragmatic" approach is criticized by some journalists and right wing politicians. Their concerns have been best expressed by Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Capital Weekly, Ms. Galina Alexandrova, who argued that by paying attention only to the economic dimension, some Bulgarian politicians forget the political price, which according to her is very "politically high" in the case of Bulgaria-Russia economic relations.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, if we consider the fact that energy supply dependency of such neighbours of Russia as Ukraine and Georgia has been used by Moscow as a tool of strengthening Russian political positions in these countries, we could conclude that the political dimension of economic relations between Bulgaria and Russia is becoming increasingly important.

Minister Ovcharov has stated that Bulgaria is trying to diversify both energy suppliers and energy sources. The diversification of energy suppliers includes negotiations with countries such as Turkey, Egypt, Kazakhstan and Algeria, which are carried out by the Bulgarian government. But in Ovcharov's opinion the prices of supply will be higher than those

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<sup>21</sup> This is a pipeline connecting the Bulgarian port of Burgas on the Black Sea and the Greek town of Alexandroupolis on the Aegean Sea, which is meant to be built jointly by Bulgaria, Greece and Russia. – note of Krassimir Nikolov.

<sup>22</sup> Papakochev, Georgi, "Miastoto na Balgaria v energiinoto satrudnichestvo mejdu Evropa i Rusia" ("The place of Bulgaria within the Energy Partnership between Europe and Russia"); commentary for Deutsche Welle; 13.09.2006; available at: <http://www.europe.bg/> (a Bulgarian EU-related portal hosted by the European Institute); accessed on 28.10.2006.

<sup>23</sup> Views expressed at the Conference "Bulgaria and Energy Security Policy"; 25.07.2006; Sofia. (conference minutes).

proposed by Russia, and for Bulgaria it is difficult to afford this price-level<sup>24</sup>. In the case of the diversification of energy resources the Bulgarian government has three key priorities including efforts in three problematic areas within the Bulgarian energy sector: nuclear energy, local resources, energy efficiency<sup>25</sup>.

Several aspects of the Bulgarian government's energy policy have been criticized by right wing politicians. Mr. Ivan Ivanov, Bulgarian MP from the Democrats for Strong Bulgaria Party, emphasized on the complete lack of accountability and transparency in the decision making process in the energy sector. As a result, the Bulgarian energy sector has turned into a "state within the state" with its own particular interests and agenda. Mr. Ivanov also argued that the government decision to build the Belene Nuclear Power Plant with the technical support of Russia will deepen the existing problem of Bulgarian energy dependence on Russia.<sup>26</sup> Mr. Milko Kovachev, former Minister of Energy<sup>27</sup>, underlined that energy diversification doesn't have the potential to replace supply from Russia but will make the Bulgarian negotiating position stronger<sup>28</sup>.

### *Belene Nuclear Power Plant*

The Bulgarian Minister of Economy and Energy, Mr. Rumen Ovcharov, is well known for his strong support for the future development of Bulgarian nuclear energy sector. During the accession negotiations between Bulgaria and EU he was one of the most outspoken opposition politicians who strongly protested the shutdown of blocks 3 and 4 of Kozlodui Nuclear Power Plant. His current support for the building of a new Nuclear Power Plant in Belene (also on the Danube) is therefore not surprising. In his view – shared to a large extent by all politicians within the Bulgarian Socialist Party and other parties from the governing coalition – the building of the Belene Nuclear Power Plant is an opportunity for Bulgaria to play a leading role in the energy sector in the Balkans, to guarantee low prices for Bulgarian consumers and

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<sup>24</sup> Speech of Bulgarian Minister of Economy and Energy, Mr. Rumen Ovcharov, at the conference "Bulgaria and the Energy Security..."

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>26</sup> Views expressed at the conference "Bulgaria and Energy Security..." (conference minutes).

<sup>27</sup> Mr. Kovachev was Minister of Energy (2001-2005) and Minister of Economy (2005) in the government of the National Movement of Simeon II (NDSV). This liberal party is a coalition partner of the Bulgarian Socialist Party in a three party government since 2005. – note of Krassimir Nikolov.

<sup>28</sup> Views expressed at the conference "Bulgaria and Energy Security..." (conference minutes).

to limit the importance of the Bulgarian energy dependency problem.<sup>29</sup> Thus the construction company, responsible for building the Belene Nuclear Power Plant, has been announced early in November 2006, in the first days after the Bulgarian presidential elections won by current Bulgarian President, Mr. Georgi Parvanov (former leader of Bulgarian Socialist Party). This is the Gazprom-owned company, “Atomstroyexport”. This decision divided Bulgarian society and the political elite. It was strongly criticized by right wing politicians and journalists, and received the support of left wing parties and social circles pleading for close relations with Russia. The critics of the contract pointed out the complete lack of transparency during the tender procedure and potential negative effects (financial, political and ecological), which the decision could induce in Bulgaria. In a special issue of the weekly newspaper, “Kapital”, the Belene project was described by Bulgarian journalists, scholars and diplomats as a “political game [...] in the Russian interest”<sup>30</sup>, a “risk for four billion euro”<sup>31</sup>, “a political weapon of Moscow”<sup>32</sup>, and “a way for ‘controlled’ membership in the EU and NATO”<sup>33</sup>. Supporters, on the other hand, outlined expected benefits in terms of low energy prices and strengthening the role of Bulgaria in the region. The Belene project turned out to be one of the most debated topics in Bulgaria during the last months of 2006.

### *Energy Security – Regional Aspects*

There is a broadly shared opinion among Bulgarian decision-makers that Bulgaria has to remain a country with a significant role in the Balkans energy sector. Thus, in an interview for Euronews Bulgarian President, Mr. Georgi Parvanov, argued “the fact is that Bulgaria definitely has ambitions in the area of energy and would like to retain its position as an energy hub for the region. This can be achieved in different ways. We want to develop our nuclear sector. We are building a new nuclear facility, which will meet all European and world standards in this field. Bulgaria is also working to achieve the status of a major transit hub for

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<sup>29</sup> Speech of Bulgarian Minister of Economy and Energy, Mr. Rumen Ovcharov, at the South-East European Economic Forum; 01.11.2006; available at: <http://www.mi.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Ministry of Economy and Energy); accessed on 11.11.2006.

<sup>30</sup> Alexandrova, Galina; “Ruski vremena” (“Russian times”) in weekly newspaper “Kapital”; issue No 45; 11-17.11.2006; page 12.

<sup>31</sup> Velinova, Sia; “Risk za 4 mlrd. Evro” (“Risk for Four Billion Euro”) in weekly newspaper “Kapital”; issue No 45; 11-17.11.2006; page 12.

<sup>32</sup> Minchev, Ognyan; “Politicheskoto orujie na Moskva” (“The Political Weapon of Moscow”) in weekly newspaper “Kapital”; issue No 45; 11-17.11.2006; page 13.

<sup>33</sup> Vassilev, Ilian; “Nachin za “upravljaemo” clenstvo v ES i NATO” (“A Way for ‘Controlled’ Membership in the EU and NATO”) in weekly newspaper “Kapital”; issue No 45; 11-17.11.2006; page 13.

gas and oil from East to West. Given an efficient and flexible government policy, Bulgaria will be well placed to keep its position in the energy market”<sup>34</sup>.

According to the Bulgarian Minister of Economy and Energy, Bulgaria has the potential to be a regional energy actor by promoting the cooperation of Bulgarian companies with “key European and regional [energy] companies”<sup>35</sup> or by consolidation of the whole Bulgarian energy sector, which on the basis of partnership with other “regional players” can turn into a supra-regional energy actor.<sup>36</sup> This government ambition is also shared by the Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who situates the Bulgarian energy ambitions into the European context. In his view, “Bulgaria considers itself as a potential European gateway for energy supplies from the Black Sea basin and the Caspian Sea, and we take part in the common efforts towards the construction of the trans-continental transport corridors.”<sup>37</sup>

## **6. Justice and Home Affairs / European Immigration Policy**

As a result of the permanent EU pressure throughout 2006, significant changes can be observed in Bulgaria in the domestic judicial system and especially in the Prosecutor’s office. However, internal EU debate on the various sub-policy fields within the area of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) is not reflected in the Bulgarian public debate. This fact is understandable having in mind that Bulgaria is still not an EU member and is not yet fully involved in EU policy making on JHA issues. Almost the same level of attention has been paid on EU Immigration Policy issues and on increasing immigration into Mediterranean EU member states. After accession, Bulgaria will become an external border of the Union and part of the immigration flow will turn to it. Therefore, the immigration issue from now on will be a Bulgarian issue as well. Bulgarian state and society have no experience so far with large masses of immigrants coming into the country. One can expect that this topic will become an important media issue shortly after EU accession. Preconditions for that are in place: since 2005, the xenophobic political party, “Ataka”, is already represented in the Bulgarian

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<sup>34</sup> Interview of Bulgarian President, Mr. Georgi Parvanov, for Euronews; 24.09.2006; available at: <http://www.president.bg/> (the official web site of the President of Bulgaria); accessed on 05.11.2006.

<sup>35</sup> Speech of Bulgarian Minister of Economy and Energy, Mr. Rumen Ovcharov, at the conference “Bulgaria and Energy Security...”

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>37</sup> Statement by Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ivailo Kalfin, at the Summit of the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership; 05.06.2006; Bucharest; available at: <http://www.blackseforum.org/> (the official web site of the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership); accessed on 11.11.2006.

parliament. Therefore, the immigration issue has the potential of becoming highly politicized in the near future. One could speculate that the specific Bulgarian positions on the EU's Immigration Policy will develop within the broader views on the EU policy package expressed by Bulgarian Prime Minister. In his words, "we need a strong, integrated EU with more common policies"<sup>38</sup>. It is reasonable to expect that Bulgaria will support the elaboration of a common EU Immigration Policy in the future.

The second half of 2006 has witnessed increased media attention and energy focusing on the migration of European citizens within the EU. The declared UK position not to open its labour market for Bulgarians and Romanians after 1 January 2007 raised plenty of negative comments in the Bulgarian media. Following a common media discourse, Bulgarian politicians reacted as well. Thus, Bulgaria's Minister of European Affairs, Ms. Meglena Kuneva, underlined in an interview that "Europe will find out very soon that labour mobility is the biggest European advantage after accession"<sup>39</sup>. According to her, "mobility policy within the EU is a useful policy for Europe"<sup>40</sup>. Although the unfolding public debate has made clear that such a decision by the UK has been motivated by an influx of mainly Polish workers after 1 May 2004, negative attitudes have not been targeted at this "rival" and "competitor" on the labour market, but at UK authorities. The debate, in fact, has proven to be not a matter of real competition, because most Bulgarian migrants prior to accession – legal and illegal alike – have traveled to Southern EU member states (Italy, Spain, Greece) due to geographic proximity, similar cultural habits and working attitudes, etc. On the background of such a pattern of Bulgarian workers' emigration structure, the non-economic motivation of such an "anti-UK" discourse becomes clear. The decision of several "old" EU member states (not just the UK!) not to open domestic labour markets for Bulgarian and Romanian citizens has provoked protests against discriminatory attitudes and in the name of equal treatment. It reveals a high level of anxiety about the possibility of gradually sliding towards a sort of "second hand" EU membership for Bulgaria and Romania.

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<sup>38</sup> Bulgarian Prime Minister Statement on the Conference "60 dni predi ES: kakvo da ochaskvame, kakvo da pravim" ("60 days before EU: What can we expect, what can we do."); available at: <http://www.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Government); accessed on 27.10.2006.

<sup>39</sup> Interview of Bulgarian Minister of European Affairs, Ms. Meglena Kuneva, for BTV; program "V desyatkata" ("In the Target"); 30.07.2006; available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs); accessed on 27.10.2006.

<sup>40</sup> Interview of Bulgarian Minister of European Affairs, Ms. Meglena Kuneva, for BTV; program "Tazi sutrin" ("This Morning"); 08.09.2006; available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs); accessed on at: 27.10.2006.

## **7. Lebanon / Middle East**

The Lebanon war was an important media topic in Bulgaria in the period July-August 2006. An interesting feature of the media discourse concerning the war is the fact that most of the Bulgarian media avoided calling the Lebanon war a war. In media news and comments this hot topic was called a “conflict”, “crisis”, “tension escalation” but very rarely a “war”. Such a media approach was consonant with the position of Bulgarian executive officials, who kept a discrete position during the war. For example, Bulgarian Foreign Minister, Mr. Ivailo Kalfin, has explicitly pled for precaution in describing the Bulgarian position on the Lebanon war and on the participation of the country in UNIFIL as an outcome of the European states’ positions. In his words, “right after [...] the European states demonstrate their clear stand for participation [in the Lebanon mission], then we can take our position.”<sup>41</sup>

In assessing the EU role during the war and the period after it, Bulgarian media analysts have expressed opinions that the EU reaction had been very slow and the elaboration of a common position had been impeded by the different foreign policy visions of the EU member states. The articulation of these criticisms has been addressed to the EU as a whole, without paying specific attention to the role of different EU officials involved. In line with this critical approach, Bulgarian analyst Mihail Naydenov outlined that the above mentioned slow elaboration of a common EU position was the result of the intergovernmental nature of the CFSP. As a remedy, he proposed the future development of differentiated cooperation initiatives, which can make the Union more active in the foreign policy area, provoking a “spill-over” effect as a result, which would influence EU member states that had not initially been involved. According to him, differentiated cooperation will make the Union more adaptive to evolving foreign challenges within the changing international order.<sup>42</sup>

## **8. Russia and the European Neighbourhood Policy**

### *Russia*

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<sup>41</sup> Interview of Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Mr. Ivailo Kalfin, for Info Radio, program “Infotema” (“Infotheme”); 24.08.2006; available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs); accessed on 03.11.2006.

EU-Russian relations, in their complexity, have been attentively watched in analytical and academic spheres in Bulgaria, but have failed to enjoy the status of a high priority topic in the Bulgarian media and in the public debate. This situation, however, has started to change in 2006 as a result of the disputes between Brussels and Moscow on the future development of their energy relations. The influence of this debate in Bulgaria has caused the gradual formation of a debate about Bulgarian energy dependence from Russia. Thus, for the first time since the period of government of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) (1997-2001), economic relations between Bulgaria and Russia have been interpreted in their broader security aspect. As a result, the Lahti Summit between EU member states and Russian President Vladimir Putin turned into a political event provoking commentaries of several Bulgarian newspapers and TV media. The opinion of Bulgarian media expressed in response to the summit includes two important conclusions. First, the EU is not able to coordinate its positions and speak with a common voice with its powerful neighbour.<sup>43</sup> Second, the business approach to Kremlin “doesn’t work” because Russia very often uses its energy as a “powerful geopolitical weapon”<sup>44</sup>. In addition, an outspoken Bulgarian commentator has recently described Russia’s President as “the gas dictator”<sup>45</sup>.

On the basis of the recent development of relations between Bulgaria and Russia, we will try here to outline the main goals, which the EU should include into the new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with Russia. First and most important, the EU must not stop promoting its democratic and human values in partnership negotiations with Russia and neighbouring countries. The continuing support of the EU for the establishment of the values of democracy, freedom of expression, transparency and rule of law in Russia and its neighbour countries has to be the guiding light of the EU policy in the region. The EU should engage itself with the role of a promoter of these values in the neighbourhood countries. Second, the EU has to strengthen its support for democratic government and movements in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Belarus, including the active use of European

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<sup>42</sup> Naydenov, Mihail; “Evropeiskiat sajud kato globalen geopoliticheski igrach” (“European Union as a global actor”); available at: <http://www.becsa.org/> (the web site of the Bulgarian European Community Studies Association – BECSA); accessed on 18.11.2006.

<sup>43</sup> “Moskva ne ostapi pred iskaniata na ES v Lahti” (“Moscow didn’t give in to EU demands in Lahti”); “Dnevnik” newspaper; 22.10.2006; available at: <http://evropa.dnevnik.bg/>; accessed on 12.11.2006.

<sup>44</sup> “Sreshtata ES-Rusia v Lahti. Predizvesteno razocharovanie” (“The Lahti Summit EU-Russia. A Notified Disappointment”); “Dnevnik” newspaper; 19.10.2006; available at: <http://evropa.dnevnik.bg/>; accessed on 12.11.2006.

<sup>45</sup> Radev, Milen; “Gazoviat dictator” (“The Gas Dictator”); Mediapool electronic journal; 27.10.2006; available at: [www.mediapool.bg/](http://www.mediapool.bg/); accessed on 28.10.2006.

Neighbourhood Policy tools. Taking into consideration the political ambitions of Russia in the Balkans, it is important for the EU to support the democratic development of Western Balkan countries by guaranteeing their EU membership perspective. Third, the “new pragmatic approach” to Russia underlined by some EU member states must firmly stand upon EU political values. Otherwise, this “new pragmatism” will be a demonstration of a very shortsighted approach, leading to the gradual erosion of the EU political role not only within the neighbour countries but in the world as a whole. Therefore, if the EU wants to develop its economic relations with Russia, the only stable background should be the founding EU values. Any attempt by Brussels or by (some of the big) member states to artificially separate economy and politics in EU relations with Moscow will have a long-term negative effect for the EU in terms of both economic and political security. Last but not least, the EU has to speak with one voice to Russia. This will strengthen the position of every single member state and will considerably limit the advantages of Kremlin in the bilateral negotiations with EU member states.

#### *ENP – Southern dimension*

Bulgarian positions and actions on issues related to the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in the second half of 2006 have demonstrated a clear priority of the Eastern dimension of ENP over its Southern dimension. Bulgarian foreign policy activism towards the Southern and the Eastern coasts of the Mediterranean (that is, the ENP’s Southern dimension) has been blocked by difficult relations with Arab countries at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This has happened for one general and one specific reason – respectively Bulgarian support for and participation in the US-led “coalition of the willing” in the war in Iraq in 2003, and the trial in Libya against Bulgarian nurses, which started in 1998 and has not yet ended. Such a passive attitude towards the Southern Mediterranean at the political level is complemented by the absence of a public or even an academic debate, which would develop approaches or generate ideas to facilitate Bulgarian participation in the ENP. A recent conference on “Islam and Politics” held in Sofia<sup>46</sup> could serve as an example: Although the formulation of the conference title included the notion of a “wider Europe”, the ensuing debate was not focused on EU policy in that country group / geographic area. The Southern dimension of ENP was barely mentioned and its shortcomings could not even “earn” any

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<sup>46</sup> International conference “Islam and politics in a wider Europe” organized on 20-22 October 2006 in Sofia by the Centre for Intercultural Studies and Partnership – Sofia ([www.cisp-bg.org](http://www.cisp-bg.org)).

substantive criticism coming from the audience. Increased attention to political Islam as a field of study detached from the ENP remains problematic.

### *ENP – Eastern dimension*

On the contrary, the ENP's Eastern dimension has gained importance in the Bulgarian foreign policy community and at the official government level, as well. Particular attention is paid to the Black Sea area, which seems to have come into fashion as a region in terms of geopolitical and foreign policy thinking. In a situation where Bulgaria's accession brings the EU to the shores of the Black Sea, Bulgarian foreign policy demonstrates traditional prudence and "suivisme" and a growing sense of responsibility of the country as a new EU member from 1 January 2007. This trend in the direction of Bulgarian foreign policy thinking can be traced between the country's participation in the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation held on 5 June 2006 in Bucharest on the initiative of Romania and the inspiration and support of the US, on one hand, and the development of a policy paper (launched in November 2006) dedicated to "Bulgaria and the Black Sea Region", on the other hand.

- Bulgarian Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ivailo Kalfin, delivered a speech at the Bucharest forum. The event was attended by ambassador-level representatives of the US, the EU and other international organizations, by line ministers from Greece and Turkey, and by the heads of state or government of Romania and the remaining Black Sea littoral states, except Russia. Moscow did not send a representative to the forum. The level of Bulgarian attendance at the Bucharest forum signaled a moderate approach, which would demonstrate support for an initiative that would gather almost all Black Sea littoral countries without giving it disproportionate weight in a situation where a key state – Russia – was not present.
- The "Bulgaria and the Black Sea Region" policy paper, which is still in the pipeline, aims at defining government priorities and strategies towards a key geographic area where Bulgaria has vested interests motivated by geopolitical, security, economic, and, last but not least, human arguments (Bulgarian diasporas), where Bulgaria has already started taking responsibilities in a NATO framework (Sofia is the liaison for NATO relations with Georgia), and where the country will face an increasing responsibility as a new EU member from 1 January 2007 onwards. The final version of the policy paper is expected to be produced as an official government document in January-February 2007 after inter-ministerial consultations. At the current draft stage of the paper, it is possible only to

outline some of its major features and sketch further challenges. Sound and balanced analysis presents a lucid picture of the major players in the Black Sea area and their interests, points at a key dilemma on the approach to be taken for further action (“closing” / encapsulating the region versus opening / integrating it in broader formats), focuses on the limitations for Bulgaria’s role but also on the open niches that can and should be exploited. In terms of analysis and argumentation, the draft paper reflects a dominant security perspective on the region. Pending inter-ministerial coordination will have to enrich its content with more policy options and possibly achieve comprehensiveness. Further efforts could be directed at substantiating the regional dimension of inter-national and supra-national interaction around the Black Sea and at exploiting the region-building potential. Offering a clear vision on a more vibrant and integrated region will become a key asset of the final draft of the policy paper.

Forthcoming EU membership magnifies Bulgarian ambitions for an increased role in the conception and implementation of EU external policies, especially in the Union’s immediate neighbourhood. Making such ambitions come true will be successful if two major challenges are met.

- First comes the challenge of delivery – at two levels. Within foreign policy proper, proposing and carrying out concrete action on the ground should unequivocally take the lead over declaratory policy making. Declarations of expertise and experience (for example, in South Eastern Europe or in the Black Sea area) should be replaced by demonstrations of expertise and experience. In that respect, the draft policy paper mentioned above comes as a belated demonstration. At a higher EU level, Bulgaria should aim at delivering in the broader spectrum of domestic community policies. A new member state will not be perceived as a serious player in EU foreign policy making, if its credibility is compromised in a significant number of internal EU policies.
- Second comes the challenge of balance. One should not mistake the balance with the pendulum. Oscillating between the interests of global players – and in the Bulgarian East European / Black Sea area case these are the US, Russia and the EU – while making positive gestures towards one or the other across the policy spectrum will not automatically produce a balanced foreign policy and will not be regarded as an asset for the EU as a whole. The trend of demonstrating prudence in all aspects of foreign policy has to be strengthened. Prudence and moderation, in turn, should result from the

enlightened formulation of (the) national interest(s) on the basis of strategic choices that Bulgaria has made.

## **9. Current/Upcoming events and issues in your country**

Without any doubt, the most important political event for Bulgaria in 2007 will be EU accession. This is an event expected with lots of attention and hopes both by the Bulgarian political elite and society. Bulgarian EU membership will have its strong impact on the political, economic, and social development of the country in the long term, influencing the lives of several generations.

Taking into consideration the political debate in Bulgaria, we have to underline in the first place the politicians' understanding of the EU as an important political, economic and social project. Coming Bulgarian accession is best summarized by the Bulgarian President, Mr. Georgi Parvanov: "This [EU membership] is the most successful political project, which has been realized within the whole new Bulgarian history..."<sup>47</sup>. Bulgarian Prime Minister, Mr. Sergei Stanishev, has described EU accession as a "huge opportunity, and chance"<sup>48</sup> for the country.

Bulgarian politicians have paid particular attention to the normative dimension of the EU. The Union has been very often described as a "Union of rules"<sup>49</sup>, and a "community of values"<sup>50</sup>. According to the Bulgarian Prime Minister, "the big effect [from membership] will be to learn living on the basis of commonly binding rules"<sup>51</sup>. This "normative approach" towards the future Bulgarian EU membership is not surprising if we consider public surveys, according to which Bulgarians associate future membership with more justice and security in their home country. Other benefits for the country are the economic ones, coming as a result of the access

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<sup>47</sup> Interview of Bulgarian President, Mr. Georgi Parvanov, for BTV; 27.09.2006; available at: <http://www.president.bg/> (the official web site of the President of Bulgaria); accessed on 12.11.2006.

<sup>48</sup> Interview of Bulgarian Prime Minister, Mr. Sergei Stanishev, for Bulgarian National Television (BNT); program "Panorama"; 29.09.2006; available at: <http://www.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Government); accessed on 17.11.2006.

<sup>49</sup> Interview of Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ivailo Kalfin, for Bulgarian National Television (BNT), program "Denjat zapochva"; available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs); accessed on 17. 11.2006.

<sup>50</sup> Interview of Bulgarian Prime Minister, Mr. Sergei Stanishev, with "La Croix"; "Old and New Europe Should Not Stand in Opposition"; 18.10.2006. available at: <http://www.government.bg/> (the official web site of the Bulgarian Government); accessed on 05.11.2006.

of Bulgarian companies to the huge EU market, and the use of EU funds for the country's modernization. According to an opinion poll carried out in September 2006, public support for EU membership is still very high: 71% of respondents.<sup>52</sup> A higher level of support can be found among younger people with a high level of education, who point out as benefits from accession the opportunity to travel, to study, and to work abroad. In a political perspective, they expect from EU membership positive changes in the political and economic system of the country, and "better rules".<sup>53</sup>

On the basis of the above mentioned public survey, we can outline the most expected costs from EU membership. The most diffuse public fears are connected with the expected rise in prices, future bankruptcy of small and medium enterprises, and as a result – a rise in the level of unemployment in the country. Older people, with a low level of education, some small entrepreneurs, and low skilled workers demonstrate more negative attitudes to integration.

Political events with a shorter-term influence are:

- First, as a result of recent presidential elections (October 2006) Bulgarian President, Mr. Georgi Parvanov, will start his second consecutive office term in 2007. Thus, for the first time after the fall of communism, a Bulgarian politician at the highest level of the executive branch (be it president or prime minister) will have the opportunity to double his term of office. Bulgarian political analysts' expectations from this second presidential mandate are that Mr. Parvanov be more active in domestic politics, trying to influence the coalition government policies in the social, economic and foreign spheres. The reaction of the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Mr. Sergey Stanishev, to presidential initiatives will be interesting to observe and analyse, as it will possibly reflect a general trend of increasing the role of the presidential institution in Bulgarian political life. Concerning future Bulgarian policy initiatives in the EU, the development of the President – Prime Minister relationship is not expected to have a significant impact.
- Second, the EU Commission will welcome a Bulgarian Commissioner for the first time. This is going to be the current Bulgarian Minister of European Affairs, Ms. Meglena Kuneva, who will take the consumer protection portfolio. She is well known both in

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<sup>51</sup> Interview of Bulgarian Prime Minister, Mr. Sergei Stanishev, for Bulgarian National Television (BNT); program "Panorama"; 29.09.2006;...

<sup>52</sup> Survey of September 2006, conducted by ALPHA Research Agency; published in Dnevnik.bg; "Podkrepatata za evrointegracijata ot novo se e pokachila" ("Support for EU integration is rising again") on 28.09.2006; available at: <http://www.evropa.dnevnik.bg/>; accessed on 22.10.2006.

Brussels and Sofia for her strong support for Bulgaria's EU integration, and she is expected to struggle within the Commission for a political agenda strengthening the role of the EU in member states' policies, promoting a stronger and united EU. The figure of Ms. Kuneva as a future commissioner has been interpreted in the Bulgarian media in a way much different from her incumbent functions. She has been presented as the Bulgarian politician who will be "our man (woman) in Brussels", who will defend Bulgarian interests in the Commission, and who will represent Bulgarian initiatives at the EU level. The "discovery" of the actual role of a commissioner bears the risk of disappointing Bulgarian citizens and of diminishing public support for the EU<sup>54</sup>.

- Third, the first EP elections are expected to be held in Bulgaria in May 2007. Having the latest presidential election results in the hindsight, the victory in EP elections will most probably go to the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). Other parties, which are expected to be well presented at these elections, are the populist party, "Ataka", and the Bulgarian-Turks minority party, Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF). According to commonly expressed expert opinions, the political crisis of Bulgarian right wing opposition parties will deepen as a result of their expected defeat at these EP elections. The recent formation of young right wing politicians called "European Democratic Path" embraces MPs with non-negligible EU experience – within the joint Bulgaria-EU parliamentary committee, within the European Convention (2002-2003) or in the capacity of active observers at the EU (since September 2005). They are preparing their ranks for the EP elections, but have not yet demonstrated a capacity to offer new political projects to the public, which would enable them to take the lead in overcoming the current crisis. The big question mark with regard to political developments and EP elections in particular is for the new party of Sofia Mayor, Mr. Boiko Borisov – Citizens for a European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) – established on 4 December 2006. If there can be EP election surprises they will most probably come from this still nascent party.
- A fourth line of developments, these are expected changes in the Bulgarian coalition government. Most probably these changes will reflect presidential election results, strengthening government positions of BSP and MRF at the expense of the liberals from the National Movement Simeon Second (NMSS). This government "reconstruction" is

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<sup>53</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>54</sup> This "discovery" will come as the result of deepening the "real" EU integration of Bulgaria at the level of business and citizens. Consumer protection is a policy field where Bulgarian companies are expected to face serious problems with EU rules. – note by Dragomir Stoyanov.

unlikely to influence Bulgaria's EU positions because the integration project of the coalition government was and is the strongest tool legitimizing it.

- Fifth, the degree of EU funds absorption will be of particular importance during this first year of Bulgarian EU membership. According to some politicians the absorption level will be around 20% – a figure that can provoke the disappointment of Bulgarians who interpret benefits from EU membership mainly in economic terms.

### **Key message on the current state of debate on EU issues**

Just weeks before the EU accession of Bulgaria, public debate on EU issues in the country is more active than ever. Although “hot”, the EU debate in the Bulgarian media is predominantly concentrated on possible Bulgarian gains and losses from accession. Apart from that, the gradual “internalization” of EU priorities and agenda items into Bulgarian policy making and the domestic political and public debate has already started, although in a fragmented manner, at a slow pace, and in a specific direction “from the outside inwards” – i.e. first in the field of EU external relations and only to a very limited degree in the field of internal EU policies. Thus, Bulgarian foreign policy priorities are already conceptualized from the perspective of a future EU member state (hence, the focus on the Western Balkans and the Black Sea area). On the contrary, “internally” oriented policy fields (i.e. EU immigration policy, EU energy policy, etc.) – where political and economic institutions are not in such an intensive and immediate contact with Brussels – still demonstrate a short term policy horizon and are not yet adjusted to the new “EU reality”. In the third place, EU agenda items touching upon the direction of the Union's strategic development (i.e. the EU constitutional debate) have remained, for the time being, within the interest field of specialized academic circles and have failed to enter the broad political and public discourse. Following this logic, we can expect that the deepening of Bulgaria's integration will gradually transform EU politics and policies into an important part of the Bulgarian internal debate. And the dominant dimension of the EU public debate in the country, which is limited to the level of emotions, and expression of hopes and fears, will change its focus significantly.

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