

Courtesy Translation

**TO
MR JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO
PRESIDENT OF THE
EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Subject: Statement of the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria on the European Commission's 2011 Annual Enlargement Package and the Annual European Neighbourhood Policy package, with a focus on the Eastern Partnership

DEAR MR BARROSO,

At a joint sitting, held on December 15, 2011, the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds (CEAOEF) and the Foreign Policy and Defence Committee (FPDC) discussed the following European Commission documents, included as item 61, 62 and 63 of the Bulgarian Parliament Annual Working Programme (AWP) on EU Affairs (2011):

- Annual European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) package, with a focus on the Eastern Partnership, *COM (2011) 303 (item 61 of the AWP)*;
- European Commission's 2011 Annual Enlargement Package, *COM (2011) 666 (item 62 of the AWP)*;
- Commission Opinion on Serbia's application for EU membership, *COM (2011) 668 (item 63 of the AWP)*;

In the course of the committee debates, the following accents were brought to the fore with regard to the Enlargement Package:

- The deepening of European Integration goes hand-in-hand with Enlargement. From this point of view, the Bulgarian Parliament supports the dynamics of the EU's enlargement process and the signing of the Accession Treaty with Croatia;
- Maintaining the spirit of good neighbourly relations and cooperation, while strictly abiding by the principles of conditionality and own merits;
- The building of a modern infrastructure in order to overcome physical barriers and also stereotypes, still prevalent among the countries of the Western Balkans;
- The Enlargement Policy is an instrument for reforms. Along with the stabilization processes that take place within the EU candidate countries and potential membership candidates, the latter ought to work toward strengthening the integrity of the European Union;
- The success of the Enlargement Policy is dependent not only on the actual enlargement, but also on the positive attitude toward integration. For the purpose of enlargement to be successfully realized, the citizenry ought to be more broadly informed on the subject.

Regarding the European Neighbourhood Policy, incl. the Eastern Partnership, the Bulgarian Parliament welcomes the priority which the EU attaches to the process of stabilisation and democratisation in its neighbourhood countries. The revised ENP should be based on the principles of differentiation, as per the individual needs of our neighbours, more rigorous conditionality of the assistance made available, depending on compliance with the political criteria, and more local ownership on the part of partners.

In the framework of the intensive political dialogue between the Bulgarian Parliament and the European Institutions on the EU draft acts, attached herewith please find the unanimously adopted joint reports and supporting statements by both committees, reflecting the position of the Bulgarian Parliament on the three topics.

Enclosure: as per text.

Yours sincerely,

**PRESIDENT
OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

TSETSKA TSACHEVA



**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA**

STATEMENT

**OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA
ON THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S ANNUAL ENLARGEMENT PACKAGE 2011**

At a joint sitting, held on December 15, 2011, the **Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds** and the **Foreign Policy and Defence Committee** discussed the **European Commission's 2011 Annual Enlargement Package**, included as **item 62** of the Bulgarian Parliament Annual Working Programme on EU Affairs (2011).

Having discussed the Commission's Annual Enlargement Package, and in particular the *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2011-2012 COM (2011) 666 final*, the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds and the Foreign Policy and Defence Committee **expressed their unanimous support for the following statement** which is to be sent to the EU institutions:

1. We are convinced that the enlargement process provides momentum for **reforms** in the enlargement countries and expands the area of stability, peace, democracy and prosperity for the EU. Stable Western Balkans means a stable Europe.
2. We consider enlargement to be one of the most important and **efficient instruments** of the EU for pursuing its **strategic interests**. It facilitates the achievement of the EU goals in a range of significant policy areas such as energy, transport, environmental protection, climate change mitigation, increased security.
3. It is our opinion that the **dynamism of the enlargement process should be maintained**. Following the signing of the Accession Treaty with Croatia, it is important to keep the enlargement focus on the EU agenda, along with efforts to overcome the aftermath of the global economic and financial crisis.
4. We believe that the topic of **deepening European integration** goes hand in hand with the topic of **EU enlargement**. An analysis of the previous **enlargements** of the European Community/the European Union can lead us to conclude that generally each enlargement has provided an impetus for the **development of integration**. In this connection, the new economic governance in the EU will demand that the European Commission strengthen its **monitoring of candidate countries' macroeconomic policies**. In that context, countries aspiring for EU membership will be expected to follow the strategic guidelines for EU economic governance, including by improving the business environment in order to overcome the economic crisis and achieve sustainable growth, and by pursuing the goals of the **Europe 2020** strategy.
5. We share the main Commission conclusions in its 2011 Annual Enlargement Policy Package. We welcome the strict adherence to **the principles of conditionality and own merits**.
6. We view positively the new approach proposed by the Commission to open a **dialogue on negotiating chapters on the judiciary and fundamental rights and on justice, freedom and security early in the negotiation process** in order to allow sufficient time for achievement of convincing track records.
7. We believe that regional cooperation underpinning reconciliation and integration into the EU should remain an essential element of the Stabilisation and Association process. This cooperation has shown further progress in a number of areas, yet certain stereotypes persist,

mostly relating to conflicts from the past, continuing to challenge stability on the Western Balkans.

8. We join in the recommendation suggesting that bilateral issues need to be solved by the parties concerned, with determination, in a **good neighbourly spirit** and taking into account overall EU interests. In view of the key importance of good neighbourly relations for the accession process, the use, in public statements, of negative qualifications about partners should be strongly condemned.

9. We believe that **the development of modern infrastructure** would help overcome physical barriers, improve accessibility and closeness, which would help **overcome existing stereotypes** and increase trust and the desire for sharing and mutual assistance among citizens in the region. In its turn, that will facilitate the development process and the European perspective, for political integration of Southeast European countries.

10. We acknowledge the progress made in the negotiation process with Western Balkan countries and Iceland. As an EU member-state and a country in Southeast Europe, Bulgaria will continue to yield consistent support for the process of European integration of countries in the region.

Concerning EU candidate countries:

10.1 We welcome the signing of the EU – Croatia Accession Treaty effective as of 1 July 2013 and we congratulate the Polish Presidency of the EU on its efforts to that end. We anticipate Croatia's accession to the EU to provide an additional impetus to reforms in the Western Balkans region and be seen as proof for the rest of the enlargement countries that EU membership is an achievable goal, provided the relevant criteria and standards are met. Croatia's accession in 2013 will be a clear sign of EU's commitment to the region. We expect the upcoming referendum in Croatia to signal its firm determination to sustain a fast pace of its reform process, in order to justify the trust. On many occasions, Bulgaria's parliament has stated its readiness to stand among the first to ratify the EU – Croatia Accession Treaty.

10.2 We support Turkey's European perspective, since it is important for Bulgaria to have a stable neighbour implementing democratic reforms. This is important for the European Union as a whole. Bulgaria will support active cooperation both at the intergovernmental level and between civil society organisations in both countries as an important factor for the irreversibility of Turkey's democratization process and its good neighbourly relations with Bulgaria. We believe that the pace of negotiations with Turkey depends on the pace of implementing internal reforms towards meeting membership criteria (the own merits principle). Concerning the implementation of the Additional protocol to the Ankara Agreement, we believe that agreements should be honoured. Taking into consideration Turkey's strategic role for EU's energy security and for stability in the Middle East and the Caucasus, we welcome the existing and future agreements between the two parties with a view of energy supply diversification. We express our hope that through the Joint Committee on Outstanding Issues, the issue of compensation for the heirs of Bulgarian refugees from Eastern Thrace and Asia Minor will find its best positive solution.

10.3 We support the European perspective for the Republic of Macedonia, based on the achievement of all membership criteria, including good neighbourly relations, regional cooperation and the resolution of bilateral issues in the spirit of European values. We underline that the country's European future largely depends on resolving the bilateral dispute with Greece and overcoming the hate language used in the media about neighbouring countries. Bulgaria's position is that Macedonia should demonstrate that it is a good neighbour of all countries on the Balkans, that it is implementing the relevant reforms on its way to EU membership, and that it is committed to regional cooperation. We call for visible progress

in the negotiation process in key areas such as freedom of the press and freedom of speech. In view of Bulgaria's experience gained in the EU membership negotiation process, we express our readiness to cooperate in settling issues relating to discrimination against citizens who determine themselves as Bulgarians, and in implementing reforms relating to the region's history, such as the study of objective history, including the opening of the records of the communist secret services.

*10.4 We support the European Council decision of 9 December 2011 stating that, with a view of **opening up accession negotiations with Montenegro** in June 2012, the Council would consider Montenegro's progress made in implementing reforms, with a special focus on the rule of law and fundamental rights, and particularly on combating corruption and organised crime, based on a report to be presented by the Commission in the first half of 2012.*

*10.5 Taking account of the increased public support in **Iceland** for continuing the negotiation process, we underline the need for further efforts in that regard. We welcome the Commission efforts to provide information about the EU in support of an objective internal debate in Iceland on EU membership.*

Concerning potential EU candidate countries:

*10.6 We express our agreement with the Commission opinion concerning **Albania** and call upon all parties to observe the rules of democracy and settle their differences with a commitment to their country's European future.*

*10.7 We support the European perspective for **Serbia** and we welcome the fact that Serbia has re-engaged in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. We support the European Council Decision of 9 December 2011 to pass a decision on granting Serbia candidate-country status in 2012, provided Serbia has continued to demonstrate a reliable commitment and has achieved additional progress in the bona fide implementation of agreements reached in the course of the dialogue, including those concerning integrated border management, and has reached an agreement concerning inclusive regional cooperation, and has actively cooperated with EULEX and KFOR.*

*10.8 We note regretfully that **Bosnia and Herzegovina** is lagging behind its neighbours in progressing towards its European perspective. We join the Commission's call on the country's political leaders to put considerable effort in implementing the established priorities, including: forming a central government; amending the Constitution in line with the European Court of Human Rights ruling, adoption of a law on state aid, and a census law.*

*10.9 We underline that the European perspective of the Western Balkans will not be complete without **Kosovo** as a fully integrated part of the overall process. We welcome the Commission's readiness to launch a visa dialogue with Kosovo before the end of the year, and its proposal for a structured dialogue in the rule-of-law area in order to support the Kosovo authorities in facing the challenges in that area, including reforming its judiciary.*

11. We believe that the integration of new countries should contribute not only to **their own stabilization but also to strengthening the EU**. In this connection, there is a need for a higher pace of adapting the policies of candidate countries to European standards and requirements, to ensure the simultaneous implementation of processes, transformation and integration, on their road to EU.

12. We believe that the success of enlargement depends not only on the act of enlargement itself but also on **the positive public opinion concerning the integration** of new member states. In this connection, we note the key role of **more active public awareness-raising and educating the citizens as to the need for enlargement**.