



STATESMEN'S **FORUM**

The Southern Dimension Of Nato Enlargement: Bulgaria's Contribution

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Ladies and gentlemen:

First of all I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak at the CSIS - one of the leading Washington think-tanks for strategic and international studies - and share with you how Bulgaria sees the process of NATO enlargement, our preparations for membership, and the reasons why we believe that Bulgaria should be invited to join the Alliance.

We welcome the message sent by President Bush to the participants in the Bucharest Forum of the Vilnius-10 countries, held on March 25 2002, confirming our expectation that at the Prague NATO Summit in November a historical step toward elimination of all remaining division lines in Europe will be made. The vision of a bold decision on a robust NATO enlargement with new members from the Baltic to the Black Sea has been reconfirmed once again. Over the past several years Bulgaria has clearly proved its will and determination to meet the criteria for NATO and EU membership. Our country consistently implements the undertaken commitments in the global coalition against terrorism, in strengthening stability in our region and in the building of peaceful and indivisible Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Yesterday, during my talks in Ottawa with my Canadian colleague Art Eggleton, one particular theme was dominant. It so happened that on September 11 last year he was on a visit to Sofia and we heard together the first striking news about the terrorist attacks on America. There are days that are engraved in one's mind with all their details no matter that their fatal consequences become clear later on.

Bulgaria - a member of the antiterrorist coalition

On September 11th Bulgaria categorically expressed its solidarity with the US. It joined the anti-terrorist coalition and reiterated its readiness to act as a de facto NATO Ally and fulfill the obligations stemming from the North Atlantic Treaty including its Article V.

As contribution to the operation "Enduring Freedom" Bulgaria granted access to its airspace for coalition aircraft and provided a well-suited airfield for the needs of the operation. Last February Bulgaria sent a specialized decontamination unit of 40 servicemen to participate in the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

A major goal of my current visit here is specifying the parameters of our future cooperation with the US and the other coalition partners in Afghanistan. I fully concur with Secretary Rumsfeld's assessment about the clear-cut goals of the international military presence in Kabul and other regions of the country. The establishment of new Armed Forces in Afghanistan, able to cope with the present and future challenges, is of primary importance. In spite of our own financial restrictions we are considering the possibility to support this most difficult process.

The combat against terrorism has been reflected in the doctrinal national security documents of Bulgaria - the National Security Concept, the Military Doctrine as well as the Law on Defense and Armed Forces. The Parliament has ratified a package of international conventions in the area of security. The Council of Ministers adopted the necessary regulations for the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1373 and other relevant resolutions including those referring to freezing of accounts and cutting sources of financing terrorism. The lists for such checks are regularly updated. A special national Plan for disclosure and prevention of terrorist actions on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria was developed. We are an active partner in the international cooperation for prevention of terrorist acts through early warning and exchange of intelligence information on terrorist networks and arms trade or dual-use goods.

Bulgaria has started its two-year term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for 2002 - 2003. This makes our responsibility even bigger on the whole spectrum of the UN activities for countering terrorism and for supporting the mission of the special UN Representative for Afghanistan Lahdar Brahimi in the post-war reconstruction effort.

Bulgaria's preparations for NATO membership increase our potential to contribute substantially to the global fight against terrorism.

The geo-political and geo-strategic context of NATO Enlargement to the Southeast and the possible Bulgarian contribution.

Bulgaria has a strategically important geographic location - it is in the center of the Balkan Peninsula, on the border between Christianity and Islam, links Europe and Asia and is on the way to the Middle East, the Caucuses, Central Asia and the Caspian region, Northern Africa and the Mediterranean. This has geo-political, geo-strategic, economic, military, infrastructure (transportation, energy and communications) as well as cultural dimensions.

The actions undertaken by the USA and the anti-terrorist coalition as well as the efforts of the international community aimed at settling the regional problems and applying the European and Euro-Atlantic standards in view of the durable stabilization of the peace process has an impact on the situation in South Eastern Europe. Of great importance are the joint efforts in fighting the non-military threats and challenges of security, such as organized crime, drugs, goods and armament (including those for mass destruction) traffic, the illegal traffic of people, money laundering.

Of course the priority is the war against terrorism as the biggest threat for mankind today. Half a year after the beginning of the operations in Central Asia it becomes clearer and clearer that they need strong political, military and infrastructural rear and support. Bulgaria together with Romania through their membership in NATO will unite the Central and Southern dimension of the Alliance and will provide a reliable infrastructure, transportation and communications, logistic and of course military support for the anti terrorist strategy in the Middle East and Asia.

Bulgaria welcomes the most recent positive trends in the cooperation between NATO and the Russian Federation and believes it contributes to strengthening of peace and security in Europe and the world as a whole.

Bulgaria's preparations for NATO membership - concrete steps

The Government is doing utmost efforts to meet NATO membership criteria. Of key importance are **preserving the political, economic and financial stability as well as the continuity in the Euro-Atlantic and regional policy**. Preparations for membership comprise of a number of specific legislative and other measures including fighting corruption and organized crime. I am confident that Bulgaria meets the political criteria for NATO membership: the democratic changes in the country are irreversible and are going deeper. I should also point out the successful model of ethnic tolerance and cooperation in recent years. An asset of our coalition government is the participation in it of representatives of the ethnic minorities.

A crucial goal and pillar in our membership strategy is **the radical reform of the Bulgarian Arm Forces aimed at making it compatible with the Alliance standards** and interoperable with the Armed Forces of the member countries. We are well aware of the fact that the military reform will not be completed by the time we are invited for NATO membership. Bulgaria will continue the reform of its Armed Forces after the country becomes a member of the Alliance. The reform is not simply done for the sake of downsizing. The goal is building strong, contemporary and interoperable Armed Forces, which are a reliable partner of the NATO member Armed Forces.

Right after the 1999 Washington NATO Summit Bulgaria adopted the Membership Action Plan (MAP), joined NATO's South East Europe Initiative and the Enhanced and More Operational PfP.

The efforts for the implementation of the third Annual National Program of the MAP approved in September 2001 are focused on developing the Bulgarian capacities for practical contribution to the realization of NATO collective defense tasks. The Program is aimed at achieving interoperability in key areas such as : Stability; Democratization; Professionalization; Development of operational capacities for the realization of collective defense tasks and participation in operations other than war; Modernization and rearmament.

In order to adapt the defense policy and planning to the approach and principles of the NATO's Strategic Concept, Bulgaria has upgraded the Planning, Programming and Budgeting System. The planning principles have also been amended. One thing is certain - resources would be always insufficient to achieve everything we would like to. Due to that Bulgaria will continue to focus its efforts on the realization of its priorities paying much more attention on quality rather than quantity i.e. implementing a smaller and realistic number of activities related to the MAP and the Partnership Goals.

We are involved in an unprecedented defense restructuring in terms of magnitude and scope. Together with the reduction of military infrastructure and major armaments in the course of the current and coming year around 15 000 officers and NCOs will be released from the Bulgarian Armed Forces. According to our plans by the end of 2004 the BA should amount to 45 000 people in peacetime. Special structural branches are working for improving the motivation and life standard of the servicemen and their families. Specialized centers are helping out in the adaptation of the reserved officers and NCOs.

Bulgaria's contribution to the NATO lead SFOR and KFOR is substantial. Presently Bulgaria participates in these operations with a guard company for SFOR HQ, mechanized platoon in Bosnia and Herzegovina and an engineer platoon in KFOR. The Bulgarian Air Force supports these operations through regular flights. A National Coordination Center for logistic support of the transit KFOR troops and materiel is functioning in the country. As of today, Bulgaria trains and

prepares its contingents for participation in peacekeeping operations and after the country is invited to join the Alliance it will be ready to train contingents for the needs of collective defense as well as other NATO missions.

In view of our priorities the efforts are directed towards putting into place new command, control and communications systems compatible with NATO communications and information system. The Field Integrated Communications and Information System is currently being tested and will be soon operational. The project for establishing an Air Sovereignty Operational center is finalized while the work on building some elements of the national Air Defense still continues. These elements will provide for the integration of the national Air Defense into NATO Air Defense.

We expect that the planned speeding up of the structural reform of the Bulgarian Army, the downsizing of personnel, the drastic reduction of obsolete equipment, armament and infrastructure will soon result in freeing resources for the modernization of the existing and purchasing new armaments and equipment. By October 2002, following a decision by the Council of Ministers the SS-23, SCUD and FROG-7 missiles will be dismantled and destroyed. Currently we are making a plan for the modernization of the Bulgarian Armed Forces by the year 2015, based on the results from a joint US-Bulgarian modernization study completed in January 2002.

On 25 March at the session of NATO Political Military Steering Committee at 19 plus Bulgaria the PfP and the Planning and Review Process assessment was presented and approved. The results from these consultations are one hundred percent positive. The focus was on: realism of the Force Structure Review; the updated plans for restructuring of the Armed Forces; relevance of the plans for building up smaller but more flexible Armed Forces of enhanced combat capacities and sufficient defense potential not only for the needs of the country but able to contribute in the future to the needs of collective defense.

We are on the eve of important events. On 23 April the North Atlantic Council will approve the final assessment of the Bulgarian readiness for membership in the Alliance. It will be part of NATO's Consolidated Report on the status and progress of the aspirant countries and would also be presented at the Alliance Foreign Ministers Meeting in Reikjavik in May and later on at the Defense Ministerial Meeting in June this year.

Bulgaria believes that account would be taken of its efforts and having in mind its preparedness for membership, contribution potential and important strategic location, NATO member states will come to the conclusion that the country will be contributing substantially as a member to the collective security of the Alliance. This all gives us reasons to hope that in November in Prague, Bulgaria would be one of the invited countries since its membership in the Alliance will consolidate the Southern dimension of the Organization.

Why we believe this goal is achievable?

1. The existing political will on the issue of NATO membership - there is full consensus among all Parliamentary represented political parties;
2. The existing broad public support. According to the most recent polls 76,9% of the Bulgarians support the policy for joining the Alliance while only 18 % are against.
3. The existing plans, which are in compliance with the strategic environment and the economic capacities of the country as well as provided with resources for their realization. In February the Council of Ministers approved a decision for providing the necessary additional funds for the reform of the Armed Forces. Thus the defense expenditures are more than 3.1 % of the GDP.
4. The irreversible democratic process in the country and the continuity in the efforts of several Bulgarian governments and Presidential administrations. The most recent Parliamentary and Presidential elections not only did not change the Bulgarian policy but

on the contrary - consolidated the positions on NATO not only among the politicians but the society as a whole.

A new stage in the regional defense and security cooperation in South East Europe

Bulgaria's foreign policy is of particular importance for the situation in Southeastern Europe as a whole and is a stability factor in the region. It deepens the cooperation with the neighboring countries through friendly, open and pragmatic bilateral relations, active participation in the regional initiatives, enhanced cooperation with the international political, economic, financial and other institutions as well as the European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

The development of the regional cooperation in South Eastern Europe is combined with the efforts for speeded integration in NATO and the EU while taking good account of the national interests. Bulgaria actively participates in the multiple forms of regional defense cooperation such as the SEDM process. In May 2001 the Multinational Peace Forces South Eastern Europe (SEEBRIG), which HQ is located in Bulgaria, were officially declared operational. We are actively working with the US now for providing contemporary communication-information system, which the brigade badly needs in order to acquire deployment capacities.

In February this year in Istanbul and ten days ago in Athens meetings between Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and Turkey were held. Greece and Turkey unanimously stated that the Bulgarian and Romanian memberships in the Alliance are needed and obligatory. The establishment of an integrated military zone from the Carpathians to the Mediterranean and Central Asia would substantially change the geographic background of the overall NATO strategy and particularly in relation to the war against terrorism.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The participation of Bulgaria in the global coalition for stability, democracy and prosperity is based on our common values and is in harmony with the tasks the Bulgarian Government has assigned to itself. The NATO membership and the strategic bilateral relations with the US will create an environment enhancing our capacities. In this way our contribution to the Euro Atlantic security will be much more efficient and useful.

Thank you very much for your attention.