

RESEARCH STUDIES 12

**Bulgaria in NATO and the EU: Implications for the
Regional Foreign and Security Policy of the Country**

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THIS RESEARCH STUDY IS A PRODUCT OF THE AUTHOR'S LONGER-TERM WORK ON TRANS-ATLANTIC RELATIONS, EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, BALKAN AND BLACK SEA-CASPIAN SEA REGIONAL SECURITY STUDIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH ACTIVITIES OF ISIS.

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I. Introduction: the New Conceptual Challenges

The study includes three main interrelated issues, reflecting Bulgaria's approaches and interests in preserving and developing a particular set of partnerships in South East Europe with the purpose of continuing the trend of the region's modernisation in the fields of economy, infrastructure, technology, society and politics: first, the balancing between the special pragmatic relations of the United States with Bulgaria, and the EU integration of the country and the region; second, reaching a higher quality of NATO and EU memberships as a vehicle of pushing ahead the processes of regional emancipation, and, third, the specific regional consequences of the country's membership in NATO and soon – in the EU.

The meaning of the term "regional" in this study when discussing the foreign and security policy of Bulgaria is threefold: the Western Balkans, the whole area of South East Europe, and partly – the Black Sea-Southern Caucasus region. The Western Balkans is 'the business unfinished' for both NATO and EU, hence – it becomes a central issue of Bulgaria's Alliance and Union policy as a member and would-be-member from the very region of the Balkans. The regional foreign and security policy of Bulgaria in South East Europe would inevitably include in the years to come the ingredient of Turkey's candidacy for EU membership – not just because the Bulgarian perspective would be expected from the other EU and NATO members, but because our Turkish neighbour has similar expectations from Sofia. Most importantly as a neighbour of Turkey Bulgaria needs to keep a keen and fair eye on Ankara's preparedness to join fully the EU family of nations. And lastly, the regional foreign and security policy of Bulgaria has a clear Black Sea-Southern Caucasus accent. Due to the geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-strategic inducements of the Western Black Sea coast on the Eastern one, Bulgaria, as well as Romania, needs to prove the case of NATO and EU membership is a political, social, economic and security success to the friendly nations of Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

A main thesis of the study is that recent history has proved the network of local regional partnerships could not produce the effect of self-regulating the inadequacies and conflicts

in a reliable way, which has necessitated the deeper involvement of external power factors in the Balkan affairs – however, a benign end result of external great powers’ involvement in general – a unique consequence for the troubled region¹. The combination of ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ partnerships in the Balkans catalysed the tendencies of transformation towards a EU-compatible sub-region. NATO and its security network provided major arguments and prerequisites to the development of this process². The worthy products of the ‘bottom-up’/’top-down’ partnership cross-fertilization that deserve mentioning, because of their longer-term effects, are:

- The South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), launched in Sofia on 6-7 July 1996. The leaders of the countries, participating in SEECP reconfirmed their support for the already existing regional initiatives, sharing the same ideals of stability, cooperation and regional progress as the EU-generated on 26-27 February 1996 Royaumont Process for Stability and Good Neighbourliness in South East Europe; the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the Central European Initiative (CEI).
- SEECP closely interacted with the US-inspired Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI) or the “Schifter Initiative”, established in December 1996 and based on the “Points of Common US-EU Understanding” to promote regional economic and environmental cooperation among the countries of the region. SECI was not an economic assistance programme, but focused on self-help, though the USA, Switzerland, Austria, Italy and Germany have supported it with voluntary financial contributions.
- The launch of the NATO Partnership for Peace Programme provided a most useful framework for military cooperation in South East Europe in 1994. The Western European Union (WEU) was the first western organisation to provide formal status to the relationship with the Central, Eastern and South East European countries in 1994. Both NATO and WEU encouraged the formation in 1998 of the Multinational Peace Force South East Europe (MPFSEE) or SEEBRIG with the participation of Albania, Bulgaria, FYRO Macedonia, Greece, Italy, Romania and Turkey. Before that, in 1995 Bulgaria initiated the meetings of the Ministers and Deputy Ministers of Defence from the countries of South East

Europe (South East European Defence Ministerial), which acquired upon the initiative of Sofia in 1997 a PfP format. NATO's South East Europe Initiative (SEEI) was born later as a long-term effort to cooperate with the military in the region to help the reform of the national defence establishments.

The Bulgarian foreign and security policy has a special responsibility in providing a successful continuation of the internal regional, and the trans-regional partnerships with NATO and EU to keep the pace and stability of the transition of the Balkans towards more stable democracies and functioning market economic societies. A special challenge for Bulgaria, having the quality of a NATO country and a de facto EU member in the Balkans is what approaches and attitudes would consider appropriate and recommend as working and most effective on the set of persisting problems in the region. The wisdom of the last 16 years of the country's foreign and security policy that contributed to the appearance and effective performance of a network of partnerships in a difficult period of wars and high tensions requires refreshing. This already happens with the clear Bulgarian commitments to focus on 'completing the job' in the Western Balkans and taking simultaneously responsibilities in dealing with the geopolitical obligations as a NATO and soon EU country in the Black Sea area and in the fight on terrorism and stabilising war-torn societies in the broader Middle East. The purpose of 'Europeanising' the Balkans with the instrumental involvement of EU and NATO and preserving a positive US interest will constitute the contents of Bulgaria's foreign and security policy in a region, considered a high security priority for the country. What conceptual problems, concerning the set of partnerships in and about the Balkans, have been tackled in the last 10-15 years, and are there pending issues for Bulgaria in this area?

The tension between the partnership approach, demonstrated by NATO and EU matched from the very beginning of the 1990s with the conditionality one. The help to cope with the multitude of problems in the region of the Balkans has been pre-conditioned to certain changes the local regional actors had to perform. The Partnership for Peace Program of NATO, the NATO Study of Enlargement, the EU Agreements with Bulgaria and Romania, the various EU programs, implemented in South East Europe – all they bore

the requirements of implementing smaller or bigger changes in the societies, policies, attitudes, etc. of the local partnering country. The reason was one and very trivial – the retarded modernisation of the Balkans, coupled with post-totalitarian problems, and post-Yugoslav conflicts, hatreds and wars. All they called for encompassing changes, including mentality shifts, if the region of South East Europe was to become a normal component of the evolving and integrating developed part of Europe.

In principle, the tension between partnership, providing support in the transition and reform processes, and the conditionality principle, calling for the implementation of clearly stated requirements, is a standard issue arising from the difficulties of destabilisation while change is taking place. The real problem is not with the ontological binaries of partnership and conditionality and those who integrate them psychologically in a logical and systematic mindset, but with the actors who are pressed by the developing conditions to carry out the changes that touch or destruct their established interests.

The next issue was about the perception of these problems and the reaction to the requirements of change. One pattern of reacting has become to give as many as possible arguments how dangerous from a 'local' perspective it would be to insist on performing the changes. The opposition to systemic, psychological, political or any other change constituted the history of some post-Yugoslav countries. One logical organising concept in dealing with the insistence for change has been nationalism – in an aggressive or a milder form.

Bulgaria faced the challenge to accept that it has delayed its needed modernisation of the economy, infrastructure, technology and political organisation and any partnership 'involvement' had to be assessed from the standpoint of overcoming the country's own deficiencies, or to portray the partners' intervention as an insult that 'good patriots' would not accept. In an expedient manner the country's academic and research community provided the knowledge orientation where Bulgaria stands in the processes of globalisation, integration, post-Cold War and post-totalitarian changes to push the case of

embarking on an intensive partnership/learning process for dealing with the inadequacies of the state and society. It was not a rare phenomenon to portrait some involvements by individual NATO or EU countries' representatives as the 'intervention in the internal affairs of the sovereign country' or as demonstrations of power. The challenge for all these years has been to see under the surface, to feel the logic of the developments in the deeper waters and currents of world and regional affairs and to adapt the country's direction and attitude to the best of its longer-term interests. Patriotism has been filled with a new, constructive sense – achieving higher quality of life and reaching a level, allowing for Bulgaria to provide help to the others.

Bulgarian experts learnt a lot, in addition to their own creative approach in the 1990s to the regional issues, by joining the discussion, concerning the shaping of EU strategic approaches to the Balkans, mainly the understanding of the tensions and interface of the 'regionality' and 'conditionality' principles of the Union relative to the region³. The more general issue of the tension between partnership and conditionality is just a logical continuation of dealing with the same conceptual problem of the late 1990s. And a very significant aspect of the issue should be highlighted – whatever the problems and claims of the 'unacceptability' of the conditions, set by the EU and NATO, the minimum standard of national self-assessment and judgement by the two institutions continues to be the kind of the respective country's contribution to the security situation in the region of South East Europe. This priority focus would be, for sure, Bulgaria's perspective in its performance as a NATO and EU member from the region.

In the 1990s and till 2004 Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia experienced the healthy impact of the EU-driven strategy of 'differentiated accession' to the Union. The result was integrating Slovenia in the Union in 2004 and preparing Bulgaria and Romania for membership in 2007. This was possible because the three countries definitely solved individually the issues of stabilisation while providing stabilising support to others.

In the case of the Western Balkans the strategy of the Union of 'differentiated accession' should intensively interact with a NATO-EU shared strategy of stabilisation as a pre-

condition for membership. Brussels, probably, with an active involvement of Sofia, should mould a working and instrumental EU-NATO interactive approach that would guarantee stability of the Western Balkans in the context of a competitive EU strategy of 'differentiated accession'. The 'Adriatic Charter' countries – Albania, Croatia and FYRO Macedonia, and the PfP contenders – Serbia and Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina are at various levels of accession to the EU. Any progress on the lines of approaching the Union must necessarily become contingent upon the joint and undisputable assessment of the Alliance and of the Union that each of the acceding countries has passed the point of 'no return' to instability. Bulgaria, as well as Greece, Romania and Slovenia, could provide a significant perspective on the evolution of these processes while extending instrumental support to each of the five Western Balkan countries in covering the NATO and EU standards.

The study focuses on the three interconnected issues that Bulgaria's foreign and security policy in the region needs to stimulate and find new synergies in order that the partnership networks in South East Europe further help to emancipate the area: first, of preserving the US and EU cooperation on the Balkan issues; second, of fully applying the NATO and EU political and institutional potential to build on the presently developed partnerships and, third, Bulgaria's specific contributions in these aspects as a NATO, and soon – as EU member.

II. The Effective Balkan Partnerships Today As a Function of Cooperative US – EU Relations in the Balkans

The history of the South East European region of the last 100-150 years⁴ is a vivid reflection of the changing structural configurations of ‘great power’ conflicting relationships. There has not been a significant regional change, generated just by the relations of the local countries – in all cases the states from the region have been experiencing the direct influence of great powers from one or another ‘enemy’ camp of the respective historical period. Such developments have been natural for the small, weak and highly dependent Balkan countries: they have all been coming out from one or another crumbling empire – Ottoman or Hapsburg, according to territorial designs outlined by and reflecting the respective balance of power among the ‘great states’ of Europe.

The end of the Cold War was with concrete contents: a superior **United States** and a weakened Russia (after the demise of the Soviet federation). Though both powers preserved capabilities of mutual assured destruction they finally ceased to perceive each other as threatening of using nuclear weapons. The two leading nuclear powers no longer lead opposing ideological, political, military and economic camps against each other. The post-Cold War deals between them have provided Russia with the needed time to consolidate after the blow of the lost Cold War ‘historical competition’ and the United States with the time and potential to concentrate on its own plans of strategic re-definitions of policy and global designs.

While visions of a one-polar, multi-polar and an idealistic Wilsonian international systems are trying to provide the explanatory paradigm and variables of the present world, from our perspective, we blind ourselves to the fact that two powerful and real tendencies are in conflict in recent years: a) the tendency of the policy of most of the states in the world, including all countries of North America and Europe to be part or at least – well adapted to the US-led one-polar (in military terms) world, and, b) the tendency of politically pressing the non-existing case of multi-polarity. Both tendencies

have not been yet discussed from the point of view of their democratic governance efficiency.

The Cold War bipolar domination over South East Europe by the Soviet Union and by the United States dramatically changed with the swift retreat by Russia. The strategic vacuum in South East Europe was logically filled by the only left superpower, which, in addition, had a political vision of encouraging democratic and market economic transitions of the former socialist totalitarian countries of the Soviet camp, mainly Bulgaria and Romania – a domestic transformation, driven first of all by the people of the two Balkan countries. The contrast of the hegemonic relationships by the two South East European countries with the two great powers was from a political and psychological point of view definitely in favor of the United States. The experience of sovereignty and independent political and strategic decision-making was new for the Romanians and Bulgarians with a strong positive feeling towards the USA partly because of the memories of the Soviet-dictated limited sovereignty for its former allies.

So the future ‘pragmatic’ or ‘special’ relationships between the United States and the two South East European countries had the dual influence of the deserted ‘strategic field’ by Russia and its deep and total social, economic, political and spiritual crisis that followed the demise of the Soviet Union, on one side, and the return to freedom and democracy that naturally the people of East, Central and South East Europe linked with the victorious powerful leader of the West during the Cold War. Russia’s full retreat of its military forces from the Balkans in the summer of 2003 proved the correctness of the 1990 perceptions of this still great country, but with dramatically diminished power status on the global arena. Russia’s efforts to accommodate itself as a second-rate great power, similar to France, for example, additionally provided arguments to the earlier perceptions of Bulgaria and Romania of the changing Cold War power statuses and structural relationships among the leading centres of power.

A similar, though less influential, was the impact of the USA on the post-Yugoslav countries. The involvement of the United States in the democratic transitions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, the FYRO Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania, and

to some extent – Croatia, remains a decisive factor, guaranteeing the success of the democratic and market economic transformations in these territories and societies.

The loss of Russia's ideological, economic, social and political attraction added decisively to the defeat of Russia in the global competition of geopolitical integration nuclei, leaving a socio-political vacuum in the East, Central and South East part of Europe. This explains why an expanding European Community, later **European Union**, did not have any obstacles in taking root in these parts of the continent. This brings us to the second world power centre that matters in the structural transformations after the end of the bipolar configuration of relationships and that has had great influence on the developments as well as on the perceptions in South East Europe in the last 15 years.

There are two defining factors of South East Europe's perceptions and attitudes towards the EU. On one side, the Union is perceived as a slowly and hesitantly assuming power centre of gravity in world politics. Both its territory and population, including after its last enlargement to ten new member-states represent a meaningful source of power. The military profile of the EU is still an area of conflicting opinions. A too gradual process of establishing the defence component of the EU relative to the urgency of the pending needs to react effectively to real threats and challenges diminish its influence on global matters as well as on its individual members and contenders for membership as the crises in ex-Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq showed. EU states have nuclear weapons (UK and France), but there is no systematic common military nuclear policy of the EU. Both nuclear European powers are permanent members of the UN Security Council, but nobody bets for sure 'the EU' is represented in it. The economic, financial and scientific and technological giant that the EU has become provides a huge authority to the regional integration community in global affairs. The problem is that due to inadequacies of its global political and strategic performances as a single power this huge potential is not always most effectively backed up, protected and guaranteed. The internal union cohesion in light of the persisting role of the national factor remains an unreliable asset, leading to diminishing the weight of the EU in global affairs. 'Europe' as a system of ideas, values, standards, principles and norms of human, social and political existence has

a great potential, but is not yet as appealing as it would like it to be for the rest of the world. EU does not yet have an adequately influential presence as a single international legal subject in international organizations, including in universal ones. Treating these features of the EU relative to the United States leads to logical conclusions in favour of the greater authority of the North American power in international relations.

On the other side, the integration in the EU was perceived as the only valid and consistent political option of the countries from South East Europe, including all the required aspects of functional integration. Whatever the deficiencies of the performance of the EU as a global actor, the geographical affiliation with the Union was inevitable. The different sectors of functional integration called for various national transformations and adaptations, but the European future was not doubted by anyone in the Balkans. This future is strongly politically appealing to countries from the 'EU neighbourhood' space as Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova.

Participation in the unique social experiment of that big proportion as the construction of a European integration community of nations was did not necessarily guarantee becoming a part of the most powerful political entity in the world, but for sure it satisfied the broadest spectrum of priority interests of the individual countries in the context of an emerging global power. Furthermore, the EU enlargement policy provided for South East Europe the best option for stability and prosperity of the region. The details of the democratic reforms, of the market economy transition and good-neighbourly policies were linked to the various programs, policies and strategies applied by the EU⁵ – in the interest of the Union, of the people from South East Europe and of the United States too.

EU and the integration in it were perceived by the countries of South East Europe as the most realistic and practical vehicle of overcoming the belated modernization of the region's economy, infrastructure, standard of living of its people and political culture, shouldering conflict more often than dialogue, negotiations and reconciliation. The various formats and statuses of acceding to the Union, depending on the level of maturity of adapting to its *acquis communautaire* turned to be the most overarching political

instruments in the region of South East Europe employed ever since the demise of the Cold War structures. The people in South East Europe calculated well that the United States has fully understood the inevitability and usefulness of EU enlargement to the region for its stability as well as for America's interests and ideals of creating Europe 'whole and free' and have never perceived any obstacles that Washington would have created to their accession efforts⁶.

The adoption of a common foreign and security policy, backed up by a common defence policy of the EU and the respective capabilities may generate a perception of the formation of a second huge centre of power that would try to counter-balance the USA. This possibility may realize in 10 to 25 years, but the experience of the Iraqi crisis showed the confrontation with the United States by some great European countries has its limits and would not become broad and deep.

Furthermore, there are two other tendencies in action, which are pulling the trans-Atlantic relationships either to bandwagoning with the United States, or/and to a regulated trans-Atlantic cooperation on a commonly agreed global agenda. These tendencies definitely correspond better to the longer-term interests of countries like Bulgaria, Romania and the rest of the transition states in the Balkans, and there is large evidence they support such a development of the US-EU relations. These tendencies are corresponding to a longer-term American interest that is politically linked with both the Republican and the Democratic Parties, including with the interests of the two Administrations of George Bush. The crisis in the trans-Atlantic relations around the conflict in Iraq in 2003 led to the realization by many in Europe how futile the inducement of a EU as a rival power centre to the US would be, because of the weakness of the Union and because of the vital economic, social and political interdependence with Washington, while in America was felt how better its interests would be reached in a cooperative multilateral setting with the Europeans. The Balkan transition countries were and continue to be part of this political and intellectual awareness process. They have well understood that effective Balkan partnerships, individual and regional progress today are directly proportional to cooperative US – EU relations in South East Europe.

Our main conclusion from the analysis in this chapter of the study is that the individual South East European countries' strategic choices as to which world centre of gravity to approach with the end of the bipolar divide have had two essential motivations: first, the national systemic transformations and their orientations, and second, the perception of the US-EU as a single global centre of power. On this basis, after centuries of belated modernisation, exacerbated by decades of Soviet domination in some parts of the Balkans, it became possible to overcome the traditional historical fate of fragmentation of the region ('balkanisation') and to embark on the so much needed economic, political, infrastructure and technological progress and on adapting to the demands of globalisation by entertaining the achievements of European integration. That is why the huge attractive power of the EU was at the same time the most wished 'best choice' of the countries from the Balkans, performed in a differentiated manner according to the level of the national, social, and political maturity, mobilisation and preparedness. The undisputed national formula for every country from the region for sustainable prosperity and stability had one and the same contents – membership in the European Union.

III. Bulgaria's Foreign and Security Policy in the Balkans As a Factor of 'NATO's and EU's Vehicles' of Regional Modernization

The project of expanding the civic democratic space and zone of security to Central, Eastern and South East Europe⁷ is in its decisive phase of implementation. The progress of the individual countries in this broad European area led to the completion of the fundamental elements of the transition period from totalitarianism to democracy and functioning market economy, including in the Balkans. The plan and dream of the beginning and mid-1990s turned into reality for Bulgaria too. However, the concerns of an excessive differentiation of the individual Balkan states on their road to NATO and EU membership necessitates re-considering certain political approaches and accents of Bulgaria's regional foreign political behaviour.

Bulgaria is already a NATO member, and in several months the country joins the EU. In this situation, Bulgaria's foreign-political interests, aims and priorities preserve their dynamic system's features, but need to acquire new, additional options for a broader and thorough realization. That is why it needs, first, to keep the effective special strategic alliance with the United States according to the existing and developing national capacity, and fix the adequate for the country niche in the counter-terrorist fight. Second, it would be necessary to reach, maintain and raise the quality of membership in the North Atlantic Alliance, especially in implementing its missions, in realizing its transformation and modernization, in strengthening the results of regional stabilization and further enlargement of NATO, in continuing and successfully finalizing the national security sector reform, and, third, it needs to ratify the treaty for EU membership, raise the quality of this membership, fill with effective 'Bulgarian' contents the EU strategic instruments applied in South East Europe and fully support the Union in solving all pending complicated issues in the region on the way of its full integration in the European Union and in implementing the EU strategic approaches to the "neighbourhood" territories.

In the context of realizing of all these interests and goals the topic of Bulgaria's foreign policy behaviour in the region of South East Europe becomes a priority one. Why is this so?

First, Bulgaria persistently has been preparing the conditions for a respectful and useful partnership with the United States, demonstrated courage and principled position in the ensuing battle with terrorism. It strived for about 15 years for NATO and EU membership. In the next 5-10 years in Bulgaria's relations with the United States, NATO and EU, in the ongoing fight on terrorism there appear opportunities for the country's foreign policy to multiply the effect of the present high value of these links, to further raise the level of confidence with its allies and friends. The success of Bulgaria's relations with them is linked as well as perceived in connection with Bulgaria's position in the Balkans.

Second, Bulgaria's own prosperity is a function of a stable regional environment, which overlaps both with the expectations of the international community from Sofia and with the whole system of constructive projects for the region by the influential power centres that EU, NATO and the USA constitute. There are no serious indications that these factors of global power plan in the next 10-15 years to change the tendency of benign, constructive involvement in the Balkans. In the last 15 years Bulgaria worked hard to attract the attention of these influential factors of world politics and the catchword was Euro-Atlantic integration of the Balkans⁸. Such an attraction has been in favour of both NATO and EU too. In the years to come Bulgaria remains committed to its previous policy towards the region as the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Balkans has been in the interest of all countries of South East Europe and of the NATO and EU states.

Third, Bulgaria is interested to attract the attention of all Balkan countries to the fact that the geopolitical focus and gravity are shifting eastwards, towards the Black Sea-Caspian Sea area. The events in November-December 2003 in Georgia and the developments in the last two months of 2004 in Ukraine are powerful confirmations of these earlier predictions. That is why accelerating the completion of the job in stabilizing the Western Balkans and the Euro-Atlantic integration of the whole region are of a strategic interest to every country in our area.

Today Bulgaria belongs to the centre of world power, called NATO and soon from now – to the EU. These two institutions and their policies in the last 15 years to the Balkans

changed the historical destiny of the region. This is the new Bulgarian motivation and self-confidence in implementing its foreign and regional policy. How would Bulgaria practically implement its 'Balkan' policy to the allies and the region in general?

First, it can work to prevent a Trans-Atlantic rift, including on Balkan issues⁹. If problems persist, Bulgaria's position should be principled, clear and open in the effort to solve them. The broad spectrum of interrelationships between the two sides of the Atlantic have been perceived by Bulgaria in their complexity, as having contradictory and interface nature and on which depend fundamental interests of large groups of peoples, nations and regions of the world. More strongly, probably than traditional members of NATO and EU, the new Alliance and EU members or contending for membership countries, sense the interest of closer positions and attitudes of the two sides of the Atlantic on world affairs as they need to catch up historically with building-up relations with both North America and with the NATO and EU European countries. Preserving the positive for the Balkans trend of US-EU cooperation in tackling with the recurring conflicts and healing on a permanent basis this European area is of vital interest for all Balkan nations.

Second, Bulgarian 'Balkan' policy to the USA and NATO has certain specific features:

1. Bulgaria will be fully supportive if US military bases are to be stationed on the country's territory in carrying out their predominantly counter-terrorist functions. The US basing in Bulgaria and utilizing facilities of the army, navy and air force of the country provide new opportunities for initiative and active participation of the Bulgarian defence establishment.
2. Bulgaria will continue to work together with the USA, as a NATO member and as future EU member in completing the unfinished business in the Western Balkans. Stabilizing and democratising the area, overcoming the ethnic animosities and belated economic and infrastructure modernization of the broader Balkan region, strengthening the state institutions in all countries of the region are key anti-dots in the fight with terrorism. The US interest of keeping and increasing the stability

- while decreasing its troop numbers is within the Bulgarian potential to contribute to these tendencies – on a national, Alliance and Union basis.
3. Bulgaria has pledged to support the integration of the three ‘Adriatic Charter’ countries – Albania, Croatia and FYRO Macedonia, in NATO. The preparation for acceptance and the effective membership of Bosnia and Herzegovina and of Serbia and Montenegro in the Partnership for Peace Program are significant motives of Bulgaria’s Balkan policy. The practical instruments in this direction are many, including the coordinated cooperative effort with Greece, Turkey and Romania. Of course, stimulating and supporting the wishes of Sarajevo and Belgrade to join the PfP of NATO and the Alliance itself as a next step requires new attitude of both states to the cooperation with the International Criminal Court for former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague. Serbia also has to prove it can either have a stable common future with Montenegro or perform a peaceful separation with Podgorica. Serbia needs to continue its reforms in various areas of society and state to be able to embark effectively on a future NATO membership course. All existing partnership links of influence on Serbia’s progress – multilateral, regional, bilateral and international, having Bulgarian participation, would be utilized to the best of the region’s stability.
 4. The effective participation in KFOR is a major Alliance engagement of Bulgaria. Bulgaria continues to stick to its principled position that no ethnic cleansing would be rewarded while tackling the difficult ethnic tensions in the Balkans, including in Kosovo. Standards do matter decisively when decisions are to be taken. However, the problems of the province should be also viewed from the perspective of the inadequate economic and social environment both in Serbia and in Kosovo itself. A stagnating economy and insignificant progress in the rule of law shape an unfavourable environment for the solution of the Kosovo issues. Bulgaria should continue sending clear messages that claims for status today in Europe means a high level of regulating the human rights questions. Otherwise the international community would stick to the minimum requirement of stability as long as necessary to see progress in its own yard. A gradual transmission from

- the present status of Kosovo to an existence in an EU context seems optimal for the stability of the entity, the region and for the needed respect of human rights.
5. There is another 'sensitive' Balkan problem that has the potential to influence negatively the regional security situation and the future internal NATO relations: the behaviour of FYRO Macedonia to the cultural and historical heritage of neighbouring countries. Misappropriating foreign countries' culture and history is practiced on a regular basis by the young state and this is unacceptable for a future NATO member. In connection with this problem, however, it should not be allowed the state's destabilization on ethnic grounds – a possibility some Albanian radical elements would wish to take use of. Bulgaria is not loudly stating the issue, but according to us Sofia should contribute to the formation of the position of the Alliance on the stability of Macedonian state. The arguments should be of strengthening Macedonian statehood while not misappropriating foreign culture and history to solve issues of national identity formation. The present-day state-building mentality of Skopje bears features of the dark sides of the Yugoslav past, mainly the 'Great Serbian' state-building philosophy. Official Skopje owes this to some of its neighbours for the last 13 years. The most efficient contribution to deal with this complicated issue would be involving Macedonia into various partnership networks (international, regional, bilateral) that would prove the consistency of the state and its future without necessarily driving relationships into the past or relying on other countries' cultural achievements.
 6. Bulgaria perceives bringing to the end the process of punishing the war criminals in the Western Balkans as a major task in national, EU and NATO contexts. Without justice and reconciliation the progress of the Balkans would be harder and more painful.
 7. Bulgaria will continue to work in the context of the policy of NATO for preventing the eventual tensions, caused by the different levels of carrying out the security sector reforms of the individual Balkan countries. Bringing the goals and agendas of the reforming in all Balkan countries' security sectors is the best method and it will be realized through the membership in NATO and in the

NATO PfP program. The tools of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy should be most effectively applied to that end. Anyway, focusing on the formation of efficient law enforcement and police forces and less on big national armies by the West Balkan countries would be a prospective direction of change in the security sector of the region.

8. As a NATO Balkan country Bulgaria will continue to work for the stability and rehabilitation of Afghanistan and Iraq. It will provide its needed contribution to the stability of the Black Sea–Caspian Sea region too. Shaping a South East European attitude to these hot issues, involving Balkan interest and forces in dealing with the challenges of these new geopolitical focuses should become part of a new Bulgarian regional foreign-policy behaviour.

Third, Bulgaria's Balkan policy as a contending and prospective member of the EU has also certain specific accents:

1. A major Bulgarian responsibility for the modernization and Europeanisation of the Balkans is achieving the goal of membership of the country in the EU. The improvement of the region's economy, technology and infrastructure as well as the quality of life of the individuals and countries from South East Europe are directly linked with the EU enlargement process in the Balkans. Sofia's relations with Greece and Slovenia and partnership with Romania in achieving this goal are well understood and placed in the country's foreign policy attitudes. That is why the upcoming long ratification process of the Accession Treaty with the Union should necessarily bear this significant all-regional aspect.
2. As a future member of the EU in the several months before January 2007 Bulgaria will concentrate on the utilization of the Union's strategic instruments for South East Europe. The 'conditionality' and 'regionality' strategies of the EU are fully compatible for Bulgaria, though all involved in their implementation need to exert efforts. 'Stabilization' before 'accession' as the new philosophy of the former 'Europe Agreements' of the EU with candidate countries, applied in South East Europe¹⁰, is fully consistent from Bulgaria's perspective. Sofia fully supports Croatia's negotiations for membership in the EU and the planned launch

- of the process of Turkey's integration in the Union. Being a neighbouring country to Turkey Bulgaria needs to operationalise all 'pros' and 'cons' of Turkish EU membership and turn them into a logically arranged and consistent foreign policy of a member of the Union. It is not in Bulgaria's interest to accept closing of the exclusive European club to striving for EU membership Turkey. It would be equally unacceptable to participate in bargaining Turkish geopolitical potential for reaching EU funds and institutions as the thinking in certain Turkish circles goes. The decisions of the EU taken during the presidency of Greece for the integration of the whole Balkan region in the Union are framework documents, defining Bulgaria's attitude to the European future of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro. Bulgaria will continue its support to all EU regional programs and to the Pact of Stability for South East Europe with a special accent on the realization of the pending infrastructure projects.
3. The EU 'Neighbourhood' Policy to Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Southern Caucasus and the Eastern Mediterranean is entering and shaping the contents of Bulgaria's foreign policy approaches to these countries and regions. Soon Bulgaria will be the real EU border and the interest of the Union in the Black Sea region will for sure have some Bulgarian contribution¹¹.
 4. In the region of South East Europe Bulgaria will persist with its policy of shaping a regional security community, fully compatible with the regional security communities of the EU and NATO areas. Sofia will work for matching the 'bottom-up' and the 'top-down' efforts to strengthen the Balkan security regional community, in which solving disputes by armed conflict would become impossible. No partner of Sofia should doubt the multilateral context of completing this aim.
 5. Depending on the level of 'Balkan solidarity' we can attain, foreign investments for modernizing the region and raising the quality of life of the people would be attracted – not only from the EU and the USA, but also from other significant economic and financial actors.

6. And lastly, Bulgaria should insist the retarded infrastructure projects for modernizing the region to be put on the fast track of practical implementation as part of the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Balkans.

The conclusion of this part of the study is that Bulgaria needs to work hard as a NATO and a future EU member to influence the positive solution of the two major pending issues in the Balkans – first, the inadequate level of self-sustainable stability, and second, the belated economic, infrastructure, political, and technological modernisation. The challenge would be how to combine the attractiveness of EU and NATO membership for the other Balkan countries with the effective involvement of the two institutions in particular Western Balkan contingencies.

IV. Conclusions

Bulgaria's challenging role as a NATO and soon from now – EU member would be to work to induce the geopolitical attractiveness of the Western Black Sea coast as an exponent of the achievements of the enlargement of the Alliance and of the Union to the area while working for the accelerated solution of the pending issues in the Western part of the Balkans. The success in both undertakings while contributing to the effective dealing away with global terrorism and to other tasks, stemming from its NATO and EU memberships, shape the new destiny of the country in the years to come.

Balancing aims, ambitions, responsibilities to allies and partners with national capacity and public support is indispensable in coping with the challenging prospects. An invariable task is to preserve and elevate existing partnership networks that shaped in the last 16 years the new Balkan environment and that continue to bear the potential of its improvement.

That is why Bulgaria has the ambition to deal with the naturally rising tensions of the partnership approach and the conditionality one applied on the country and by Bulgaria itself on the way of raising the quality of its NATO membership and while completing the tasks of fully adapting to the upcoming in 2007 EU membership. The formula of doing that has been psychologically tested: 1) during the periods of shaping the NATO and EU strategies to South East Europe; 2) while dealing with the application of the 'regionality' and 'conditionality' principles of the EU in the Balkans after the Kosovo crisis; 3) when initiating the 'Sofia Process' in mid-1995 as a 'bottom-up' effort for cooperation and stability and for generating a higher level of responsibility from the regional behaviour of the Balkan states while claiming their wish for integration of their countries and of the region in the EU and NATO; 4) while realizing the immensity of the task to cope with the country's difficult reform issues, with the instabilities on its western borders, and when trying to show a positive example and induce stability as much as possible on the eastern coast of the Black Sea countries.

And this formula, which Bulgaria has applied itself on its way to NATO and EU membership and considers applicable by the rest of the region's candidates to the two institutions is: if we are serious in our intentions and declarations of joining NATO and the EU, we need to prove we can be ourselves vehicles of transition, reform, progress, development and integration. That is why Bulgaria is not, and no country from the region should be, afraid of 'getting infected' by a temporary 'culture of dependency'. While dealing with the issues of change, using the external support of the EU, NATO and the USA the 'know-how' of being modern and up-to-date in social, economic and political performance can be internalised and turned into a building-block and basic motivation of new Bulgaria, member of NATO and the EU.

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