

Speech by Minister Daniel Mitov at the Ambassadors' Conference

Sofia, 23 July 2015

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me say at the beginning of my speech that Bulgaria's diplomatic service which I now have the honour of leading, adheres to the classical maxim that the value of a state's foreign policy is in providing the best possible external conditions for the development and the prosperity of its nation.

There are moments in history when the arrow of fate is between the best and worst choices. Moments when everything that has been achieved so far can be lost, or vice versa – could lead to sustainable and continued progress. **We are at such a key moment in the history of Europe and the history of Bulgaria and have to make the correct and strategically important decisions.**

Today Bulgarian foreign policy is facing several challenges:

First, the crisis in Ukraine and the annexation of the Crimea radically changed the strategic environment and threatened the foundations of the European security architecture. Bulgaria, unfortunately, is part of the line of contact between the opposing sides in this new environment. We are on the border line of the opposition between the West and Russia which began over a year ago and is threatening to continue for much longer. This opposition was not our choice. Our choice is, however, the political stance we adopt – will it be on the side of the free and democratic world, which respects the right of every nation to choose its path of development or will it be the side of those who continue to impose a new form of the doctrine of limited sovereignty? These are different value systems and we know that the Bulgarian people and institutions have long made their choice for Bulgaria's membership in the European Union and NATO. We as a diplomatic service fulfil the will of the sovereign. We are on the side of freedom, democracy and human rights. We can not support those who are against the right of a nation to be on the European path of development and who are doing everything possible, including annexing part of another state's territory, to trample on its free choice.

On the subject of the conflict in eastern Ukraine as a cause for the general crisis in relations between the EU and NATO on the one hand and Russia on the other, let me state the following: We all hope that the Minsk agreements will be respected. It is even of greater importance that the implementation of these arrangements gradually leads to lasting stability in the context of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. Bulgaria's interest also includes preventing the danger of the conflict in eastern Ukraine

from spreading over areas inhabited by compact Bulgarian minorities or from affecting Moldova where a large Bulgarian community also lives. Bulgaria works with its partners in the EU and NATO on a daily basis to overcome these risks. The unity of EU member states is key to achieving genuine implementation of the arrangements in Minsk. **Restrictive EU measures against Russia are means of achieving this goal, not a punishment;** therefore Bulgaria supported the extension of the restrictive measures until the end of 2015. The European Union's condition for lifting the sanctions is the full implementation of the Minsk Agreement.

It is obvious, that a sustainable ease of the tension in the relations of the EU and NATO with Russia cannot be achieved without an actual solution to the crisis in Ukraine. Member States stand behind the principles of rule of law and the territorial integrity of sovereign states. Bulgaria sincerely wishes to develop friendly and mutually beneficial relations with Russia, but we must take into account the above mentioned principles. Russia needs to understand that the EU has no interest in its weakening, but in Russia being a stable partner that respects the principles of international law.

In the same geopolitical context I want to emphasize that security in the **Black Sea region** is key for Bulgaria. The region holds a particular significance for us also due to the development of a transit network for energy resources that connects producer states to the energy markets in Europe. For these reasons, we adhere to the principles of an overall stabilization of the region, which could not happen without the active involvement of the EU and NATO in security matters related to the Black Sea region. Our priority is to work towards increasing the capacity of both organizations in the Black Sea region for response to potential threats from both east and south.

The second challenge is related to state failure processes in a number of countries in the Middle East and North Africa, accompanied by the strengthening of positions by terrorist organizations such as the so-called "Islamic State". These processes have led to severe migration pressure to our country from the south and southeast, which represents a major challenge and requires the joint efforts of all institutions and structures responsible for the national security of the country.

From the standpoint of Bulgarian national interest a particularly important aspect is the prevention of the consequences of the actions of ISIS and other terrorist groups operating in North Africa and the Middle East. Since 2011, the region of the Middle East and North Africa has witnessed stratification in political, economic, religious and ethnic terms. The so-called Arab Spring triggered change of regimes in several Arab countries, but at the same time it created governance vacuum. These conditions created an environment favourable to the flourishing of radical ideology, while the ongoing conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen sparked massive refugee flows, which were also joined by many citizens of African countries. Consequently, **the European Union and Bulgaria, in particular, have been subjected to an extremely severe migratory**

pressure, under which all Member States and their institutions should develop a new strategy and take a new approach in dealing with it.

Recently, the challenge of migration has asserted itself as a main one, both to Bulgaria and to the EU. It is indicative that only in the past few months the issue has been discussed more than once even at the European Council level. A founding document was produced – the European Agenda on Migration. Bulgaria is part of the EU efforts for a comprehensive approach based on solidarity according to the capabilities of each state. **The current migration crisis is a textbook example of interlocked national and community interests.** Bulgaria took the appropriate and reasonable decision, according to its capabilities, to participate in solidarity with all Member States in sharing the burden. A narrow perspective based on national interests only would not provide us the opportunity to gain from the community benefits, and they often exceed what we could achieve at the national level.

For us the issue of migration is inextricably linked with the accession of Bulgaria to the **Schengen area. Bulgaria meets all Schengen requirements.** In an environment of unprecedented migratory pressure at the external borders that began in mid 2013, and as a transit country in relation to foreign fighters, we de facto undertook the responsibilities of a State, party to the Schengen Agreement. This is our strongest argument, as the extension of the Schengen zone would strengthen our borders and would send a strong political signal of EU unity in the fight against terrorism and illegal migration.

The third challenge is related to ensuring the energy security of the country. To achieve it, we need diversification of sources and routes of gas supplies, the construction in Bulgaria of a Gas Distribution Centre (gas hub for South East Europe), accelerated construction of the Southern Gas Corridor, and exploration for own sources of natural gas on the Black Sea continental Shelf.

Our goal is to guarantee an urgent and focused approach of the European Commission towards the region of South-eastern Europe. **This approach should be aimed at the integration of gas markets in the region with those of the European Union, as well as the diversification of gas supplies.** It should include logistical and financial support for the implementation of key regional projects. Decisive steps are needed to unleash the potential of the region. The Southern part of Europe is an important future strategic route for diversification and the gate to providing additional supplies mostly from Azerbaijan and other third countries of the Caspian region, including Iran in the future, Turkmenistan, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. Therefore, we consider the Southern Gas Corridor and related projects such as the Greece-Bulgaria Interconnector, a key element of this diversification. Given their geographical location, Bulgaria, Romania and Greece are natural routes linking the Western Balkans and Central Europe, and the idea for the realization of vertical gas corridor contains the most

significant potential for the energy security of the entire region of South-eastern Europe.

Bulgaria strongly supports the establishment of an **Energy Union** which will provide affordable, secure and sustainable energy for all European citizens. This multifaceted project is a great challenge for EU unity and for its ability to withstand strong external pressure. Bulgaria will continue to insist that diversification of sources and routes, as well as infrastructure construction and integration of energy markets in all regions of the Union are of paramount importance for the energy security of the EU. Therefore, the EU should give priority attention to infrastructure projects in the peripheral and vulnerable regions such as South-eastern Europe. These projects must comply with EU legislation and must be economically feasible, i.e. to use the shortest possible routes for transmission of gas with maximum use of existing infrastructure; they must not have an adverse affect to the realization of the Southern Gas Corridor but should actually contribute to diversification of sources, apart from routes for the transportation of gas. It is necessary to minimize the political risks, which is in fact valid for those projects carried on the territory of EU Member States.

Fourth - the challenges facing the European Union itself.

In recent years the European Union has faced the most serious challenges since the beginning of the unification process of Europe. Issues of **solidarity and responsibility** have become dominant in relations between Member States. The EU is facing internal difficulties, which are not new, but have become more critical under the pressure of the external environment. It is clear that such crises will require certain changes in the Union in the short or longer term. Our interest is that these processes do not alter the fundamental principles of the EU and its institutional architecture.

In the search for solutions to the problems two trends are observed – the first one is towards re-nationalization and the strive to return to the domestic national policies, and the other is closer integration in certain areas, as now this trend is most manifested in the management of the Eurozone. Achieving an acceptable balance for all between these two opposing trends is probably the most serious challenge facing the EU. Giving new impetus to the European project will largely depend on successfully dealing with this challenge. For Bulgaria it is important to clearly define its interests and to position itself clearly enough in these processes. The attempts to withdraw powers from the EU carry the risk of a gradual "breakdown" of the Single Market with its four freedoms, which would be a serious retreat from to the achievements of European integration.

The planned **referendum in the UK** causes tension, but it also gives a chance to discuss ways to improve the effectiveness of the EU, taking into account the specifics of individual countries. In these debates achieving a sustainable balance between national and community interests will be crucial because the EU and the UK mutually need each other. Any compromise with the fundamental principles of the European project - equality, non-discrimination and solidarity, would be unacceptable for Bulgaria.

For years the EU has put enormous effort into overcoming of the financial difficulties of some of our partners. Against this background, existing economic and social disparities between the Member States and the regions in the EU seem to have dropped down the agenda. Today our country rightly recalls a fundamental principle enshrined in the founding Treaties of our Union - **the need for cohesion in the EU and for support to the countries with the lowest income in their efforts to catch up, so that through accelerated economic growth and employment they could improve their well-being.** For our country this is a matter of paramount importance.

The Greek debt crisis has demonstrated that there is a shared interest for the Eurozone to remain united and for the European countries to pool their efforts in this direction, but also that in this common effort responsibility and solidarity go hand in hand. Restoring lost trust among partners can only happen on the basis of clear **political responsibility and determination to implement the necessary structural reforms** and the equal respect for the established general rules by all Member States.

The financial and economic crisis has made very apparent the need for **further development of the Economic and Monetary Union** so that the single currency acquires a solid economic, fiscal and political foundation. This process, required to ensure the sustainability of the Eurozone, compels us as states that are not part of the Eurozone, to work on finding the right balance between the just desire for more integration and the opportunity for us to become part of EMU too. Proponents of continued integration and institutionalization of the Eurozone claim that it is necessary to mitigate political tensions between the countries of the Eurozone. But with a great deal of probability, we can predict that this process will lead to increased political tensions between the Eurozone and other Member States.

Bulgaria's accession to the Eurozone remains a priority for our country. The government created a Coordination Council for the preparation of Bulgaria for the Eurozone with the participation of the Foreign Ministry. For us it is a matter of strategic choice that we have to be ready to accomplish, bringing into fruition the overall effect and long-term benefits for our country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ten years after Bulgaria's signing of the Accession Treaty to the EU we are aware that membership in this organization means much more than rights and obligations, opportunities and responsibilities. The European Union is not one of many international organizations in which our country is a member. By saying that this is our strategic civilizational choice, we are well aware that this choice has fundamentally changed and continues to change not only our country, but also our place in international relations.

Bulgarian Presidency of the European Union

In less than three years Bulgaria will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. In figures, this means about 1,700 meetings, chaired by Bulgaria, over 50 meetings at ministerial level, hundreds of public diplomacy events organized in countries around the world. The Presidency takes place not in Brussels and Sofia only. It will engage all our diplomatic representations.

The Bulgarian presidency will be the last before the EU enters into another election cycle for the next mandate of the European institutions. In the spring of 2019 the campaign and the election of a new European Parliament will be held and the next European Commission will be subsequently elected. This means that during our presidency we will have to complete a significant volume of legislative proposals. The work on renewing the strategic documents of the European Union for the period after 2020 will commence. Among them and of particular importance is the next multiannual financial framework for the period 2021-2027 and it will be during the Bulgarian presidency that the European Commission will submit its first proposal in the framework.

The Presidency will pose a serious challenge for the Bulgarian administration. It is however also a chance for its modernization. Better knowledge of the instruments, procedures and the participation in the EU negotiation process will make us more successful in promoting Bulgarian national interests. Investments to increase the administrative capacity will have long term effects. The first training sessions have already started. For this purpose European funds shall also be used.

The EU Presidency can help us improve the reputation of our country and increase its influence in the process of decision making in the EU to become more visible on the international stage.

Some of our priorities will inevitably be determined by the current EU agenda, however there will also be priorities that we will formulate and defend, arising from our own national priorities.

Bulgaria is in a troika with the UK and Estonia. We have already started preliminary coordination work with those partners. A meeting is scheduled between "our troika"

and the preceding "troika" of the Netherlands, Slovakia and Malta that takes over the presidency from the beginning of 2016.

Undoubtedly, the EU gives us more weight and comfort in an international environment - EU membership for a relatively small country like Bulgaria allows our voice to be heard clearly. To capitalize on these gains we need to find the right balance between national and community interests. When we talk about community interest we should realize that it is part of our national interest, since we are an integral part of the community.

EU common foreign policy and Bulgarian priorities

In the rapidly changing security environment, the complexity of global processes and recurrent regional and global challenges, the **EU Common foreign policy** is the main instrument which the Union has to protect our common values and interests. Whether the problems are imposed on our agenda as with Russia's policy in eastern Europe, migratory pressures and terrorism or they are in areas such as partnerships, environmental protection and climate change, development aid, the consolidation of the European space and integration, where we have already established leadership and positive development, we should have a vision, proactive approach and the appropriate toolbox.

Before the EU there continues to remain the need to bridge the gap between on the one hand its role as the largest donor of development funds, its leading position on issues of global importance, and especially its attractiveness as a social development model, and on the other hand – it still discrepant political influence in the world, in which all these advantages of the EU are far from being fully realized.

Foreign policy priorities for the upcoming period set out in the Strategic Agenda adopted by the European Council in June 2014, retain their primacy: maximizing our level of influence; a robust EU role in neighbouring regions; inclusion of our strategic partners and the development of co-operation in the field of security and defence.

The European Union must conduct a foreign policy that is able to ensure that these priorities are achieved with all resources at our disposal. **Three things have to be implemented to this effect:** first, completing a comprehensive review of the European Security Strategy; second; building the necessary collaboration at both EU institutions and Member States level; Third; tackling issues of our immediate surrounding as a priority - here the European Neighbourhood Policy is a prime example, but the wider, global perspective must not be lost.

The European External Action Service is the actual instrument of European diplomacy - no doubt a result of the most important and innovative structural reform in the field of

common foreign policy. Moreover, this complex institution, bringing changes in the very culture of implementation of European diplomacy is built literally on two lines from the Lisbon Treaty.

Five years after its creation, the EEAS is a modern foreign service which works in close cooperation with the diplomatic services of the Member States. The organization of the permanent presidency of the Foreign Affairs Council and a number of working bodies of the CFSP from the EEAS system showed a number of advantages towards better continuity and coordination, as witnessed from the positive reactions by our partners. Allow me to emphasize here the contribution of the High Representative Mogerini to the strengthening of the role of the European diplomacy. Let me also congratulate Ms. Mogerini for her remarkable success in the achievement of the agreement on Iran's nuclear program. Indeed, the agreement is a sign of what the European Union can contribute and must do in its foreign policy: support multilateralism and have confidence in diplomacy.

For Bulgaria it is essential to maintain a relationship of transparency and trust between the EEAS and the Member States, which are ultimately the holders of power and resources in the area of CFSP and CSDP, ensuring the participation of MS in the process of policy formation and development of specific solutions. I am convinced that increasing the exchange of information, joint analysis and ultimately, construction of a sense of common interest and synergy of actions by countries and regions are mandatory elements of the effectiveness of the common foreign policy of the Union.

I have to emphasize the Bulgarian position for maintaining geographical balance, as well as greater transparency in procedures for recruitment from national diplomatic services in the EEAS. **We have reason to strive for better representation in the EEAS, including pending Bulgaria's EU Presidency in 2018.** In this regard, the implementation of closer cooperation with the EEAS will be highly appreciated by us. The Bulgarian diplomatic service traditionally presents excellent candidates to the EEAS. We could add value with our national expertise and analysis on important areas in the CFSP such as: the Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership, the Black Sea region, Russia, MEPP and Asia.

In conclusion on this issue: the new dynamics and significantly changed security environment will require further efforts and intensive cooperation between the EEAS and the MS. We follow with interest the review of the EEAS and expect it to lead to even better synchronization of external policy objectives of the MS and the EU as a whole, and to improve coordination between institutions in different areas of external actions of the Union.

Fifth, the challenges to Bulgaria's interests in South-eastern Europe

Bulgaria's interests in the region are focused on building a sustainable environment of lasting stability and security conducive to guaranteeing the sovereignty, territorial integrity and the progressive development of Bulgaria in an environment of friendship, good-neighbourly relations and active cooperation with all our neighbours. Such an environment inevitably involves the construction of an extensive infrastructure network in the region and the smooth functioning of transit arteries, which provide connections between Bulgaria, its citizens and businesses with our partners from the European Union. These interests can be realized through the following objectives:

- Lasting peace and stability in the region;
- Establishing lasting irreversibility in the geopolitical choice of the Western Balkan countries through their integration into the EU and NATO, taking into account individual circumstances and the degree of implementation of European standards. In this context, we support the invitation of Montenegro to join NATO at the end of the year; we support Serbia's EU integration and the promotion of Kosovo's independence; we support the substantial reforms and Europeanization of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bulgaria welcomes and is ready to support the political leaders in the Republic of Macedonia in the implementation of the achieved agreements of July 15th. We sincerely hope that the **consistent implementation** of the necessary reforms, as well as the positive development of good neighbourly relations with our country will lead the Republic of Macedonia to complete fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria, which would pave its way to the EU integration process.
- Achieving new quality in bilateral relations with the countries of the region by updating the legal and contractual relationship, a regular political dialogue and intensive cooperation at all levels.
- Establishing permanent mechanisms on bilateral and multilateral basis (within the negotiations of candidate states in their accession to the EU) to guarantee the rights of Bulgarian citizens and persons belonging to the Bulgarian communities in neighbouring countries.
- Expansion of contacts in the field of culture, education, sport, media, etc., Including overcoming the problems of the past and creating conditions for lasting friendship and good neighbourliness between the individual states and Bulgaria.

- **Consolidating the image of Bulgaria as a country that is a key and an insurmountable factor for stability, security and prosperity in the region, as well as for the promotion of European values in the Balkans.**

Synergy must be a leading principle in our policy, combining a regional approach with the specific approaches to individual countries in the region. We need to incorporate our policy towards the region in Bulgaria's activities in international organizations, with priority given to the processes of European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Bulgaria holds chairmanship-in-office of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) for the period from July 1st 2015 to 30th June 2016 under the motto "SEECP – 20 Years Key to Regional Cooperation". Our chairmanship will work actively towards promoting the role of SEECP as the leading political format of cooperation in the region, as a factor of security, stability and prosperity.

Bulgaria attaches great importance to another **presidency that we will be holding – that of the Council of Europe**. We recognize the responsibility we will take and our goal is to guarantee that the Presidency of Bulgaria will fully contribute to achieving the objectives of the organization and our foreign policy priorities.

We also have an upcoming campaign which our country will carry out to raise the Bulgarian candidacy for the UN Secretary General. So far the Eastern European regional group (EERG) of the UN of which Bulgaria is part, is the only one without a Secretary General in its history so far. This creates a reasonable expectation among Member States that the ninth UNSG could be elected from EERG to which Bulgaria belongs.

These and many other questions will be the subject of forthcoming discussions at this Conference.

Allow me here to dwell on another of the main priorities of our Government program - **the effective protection of rights and interests of Bulgarians abroad**.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is guided by the understanding that Bulgarian citizens and all our compatriots abroad are an integral part of the Bulgarian nation. Our diplomatic and consular representations make continuous efforts for the preservation of national and cultural identity of Bulgarians abroad to

maintain national traditions and virtues and to achieve the **unification of all our countrymen in the framework of Bulgarian communities abroad**. We note with satisfaction the extending and intensifying scope and diversities of the forms of commitment by our missions to activities of many Bulgarian associations and societies, schools, community centres, cultural clubs, church boards and others. I had numerous opportunities to be reassured in my meetings with representatives of our “historical” communities, newer immigrant communities and young Bulgarian students abroad.

A significant role in the daily activities of our diplomatic and consular representations is given to services provided to Bulgarian citizens, to work and care for Bulgarians from vulnerable groups, and to providing protection for those of our compatriots in need.

The number of our compatriots, mostly from historical Bulgarian communities who apply for Bulgarian origin and citizenship continues to increase. Our National Assembly is considering proposals to improve the procedures relating to the acquirement of Bulgarian citizenship and our Ministry is involved in these discussions.

I wish to note that the growth of Bulgarian colonies abroad requires, regardless of existing financial constraints, to evaluate additional organizational and staffing measures to provide better consular services.

Let me use this opportunity to inform you that the Ministry is in the process of the development of a project for "electronic consular services" under the Operational Programme "Administrative Capacity", co-financed by the European Social Fund. The commissioning of this product, we hope by the end of this year, will allow the provision of electronic administrative services package to Bulgarians abroad, including receiving and processing applications for Bulgarian personal documents and the verification of certified documents from consulates of Bulgarian citizens and others.

The effective protection of rights and interests of Bulgarians abroad on the basis of a new law on consular protection, introducing electronic consular services and response system in case of disasters and emergencies, are part of our priorities. Development of cultural and educational policies for the integration of Bulgarian communities abroad and their active attitude towards processes in the country, as well as facilitation of the procedures for obtaining Bulgarian citizenship will contribute to reducing the negative demographic trends in the country and to improving the lives of Bulgarians outside Bulgaria.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the beginning I said that I am honoured to lead the Bulgarian diplomatic service in this political moment. I am aware of the great responsibility and I want to emphasize clearly as a member of the Bulgarian government in the presence of Prime Minister Borisov that we as a diplomatic community will give everything to position Bulgaria in the best way in this difficult situation and historic moment. For us Bulgaria's interests are above all. We are standing firmly on European values, we have no hesitation in our choice and this gives us a clear guideline for the direction in which we are going. The direction that will take us to ensure maximum favourable external environment for the prosperity of the Bulgarian nation. Let me remind, in the presence of the media, that the Bulgarian diplomatic service was the national institution that conducted the negotiations for Bulgaria's accession to NATO and the European Union and ensured their ratification by the parliaments of our partners, without which the accession to these two organizations, symbolizing our civilizational choice, would not have been possible. We have enough experience, sound knowledge and expertise that gives me the confidence that together we will overcome the challenges we are facing.

Thank you for your attention.