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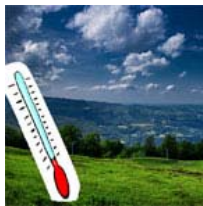
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Opinion

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Meglana Kuneva: I haven't feeling that the EC report is read word for word, to be apprehensible by everyone

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Focus: Commissioner Kuneva, what is your personal assessment of the report of the European Commission in the field of justice and home affairs? In your opinion is it more critical or less critical?

Meglana Kuneva: Since the beginning of negotiations I have been answering to almost one the same question regarding the reports. At first were overall progress reports on Bulgaria's EU membership, and now after three years of this report in the field of justice and home affairs. I can tell you with all my experience that to say which

report is more critical is something that will not work for us. It might have some sense of inter-party talking, but it is not what would help us to account for this report the job that we had done a year ago and what we have to do in the next year. Of course political evaluations should be made. These assessments are related to: are the institutions at place, are they able to make the most of what gives them the law. Where the law was not sufficiently matured, are we ready to make changes in the law that makes it more effective? Are there people who uncompromisingly and flatly to implement the legislation. In a way that ultimately, these changes that the report aims to challenge, to happen in real. The report has an expression which I think is good and that is that in Bulgaria there is a momentum in the fight against organized crime and corruption in comparison with the report of 2008. This is something that is a good assessment. I do not say that it is ideal or sufficient assessment, but it shows a step in the positive direction from 2008 onwards and will enable the new government to continue from the already achieved item. I want to tell you something very important which in inter-political speaking is always missed. As fewer things for doing remain, the better able to highlight the work of the next, which takes from now on efforts to lead Bulgaria to implement all the requirements, not only by this mechanism, but also all requirements that the citizens have to the EU and to their own state. So it would be very short-sighted if any progress in this report is not taken in adequate way by the next government.

But otherwise the criticism, of course, none is saved them in the report. Fact that the steps that are taken are mainly at technical level and have limited effects that they are not adequately supported by a broad range of political consensus and the presence of an effective strategy to combat organized crime and corruption. They must become top priority in Bulgaria.

Comments on the report of the European Commission in the fields of Justice and Home Affairs are somehow general, and I don't have the feeling that the report is read word for word, sentence for sentence to be apprehensible to all of us – not only by the outgoing government, new government, not only by all involved in the report as the Supreme Judicial Court, the Chief Prosecutor's Office, etc. And this report relies on citizens' activity, on the activity of administration, which should be impartial and apply the law. So all we need to know what does this report say because in fact the European Commission gives rights to all Bulgarians through this report for much more effective monitoring on their part and tell them exactly what areas of this monitoring should be done.

Focus: You say that you have the feeling that the report was not read carefully. In this sense, according to you, do the assessments and analysis that are being made of it here in Bulgaria and Brussels tally?

Meglana Kuneva: Look, Brussels expects that the whole report in the fields of Justice and Home Affairs in Bulgaria and each text it contains will provoke certain actions. Of course, I am ready, to derive the technical recommendations, along with the political recommendations in each separate field –the general evaluation, the fight with corruption and organized crime, the reform in the judicial system, in order to make clear which are the spheres of the respective six the Co-operation and Verification Mechanism refers to, in which Bulgaria had made progress.

They are very well specified in the second part of the report, that has been somewhat put aside. In fact, it contains many essential conclusions that are very easily understandable for us Bulgarians, because we know our faults.

But look for example, how I read the report. What has the critics is that the steps are not adequately supported by a broad political consensus or the presence of an effective strategy to combat organized crime and corruption to become a top priority in Bulgaria. There are at least three messages in this sentence. First, that we have not achieved such political consensus. It is a task for us all. Also, that the strategy itself must be outlined and it must be based on consensus. Last, Bulgaria has not actually placed the battle with organized crime and corruption among its highest priorities and does not uncompromisingly view each step trough the prism of the effect it would take.

Later in the report a very concrete explanation of what the Commission is referring to can be found. For example, the Amnesty Act. You will see that it is being criticized, because according to the Amnesty Act, we reduce the imprisonment of some people, but should we really do it, when those people have committed crimes that should keep them behind bars for up to 5 years and were involved with corruption practices and organized criminal activity. A country that is determined to battle organized crime and corruption can not grant amnesty even when the sentence in question is relatively short – from two to five years. This would mean that we have not actually put this among our highest priorities, even if we do speak otherwise.

I have 10 pages of conclusions from the report on what could be done in this very moment, what depends on the will of institutions, what depends on political will, on the Parliament. One of the things that left me with the strongest impression was the clear message that "the administration should be independent and no political party should interfere with its activity", because if this condition is fulfilled, we could rely on this independent administration to simply function as the law authorized it to.

Focus: Commissioner Kuneva, did you lobby at the European Commission for a better, more soft report on Bulgaria? Did you use this option?

Meglana Kuneva: I said that I will stay to finish my work for Bulgaria. I said I would do that because Bulgaria has some very severe tests. One of them passed on July 16 when there was a risk to launch massive criminal procedures for non-constriction of dumpsites, which Bulgaria has adopted in 2003 to build up in clear plan to 2009. That, of course, is expected from many of our citizens from us all, because dumpsites don't help for good air, or clean environment or tourism. People want these dumpsites to be built, and on top of all the European Commission has granted funds to enable this to happen. 55 dumpsites should be built up, 30 have been built. Yes, I was one of those colleagues, I was not alone, there were others who explained that screening of situation across Europe needs to be done in the autumn, it is not only Bulgaria that has such difficulties, and then it must be made everything possible to quicken our countries, including the

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technical assistance.

The second great challenge for me was this report. Yes, everyone around the table is a supra-national, but when it comes to a particular country, as we say in the College of Europe – this is the country which I know best. No Commissioner misses an opportunity to explain national specificities. I did everything possible when it comes to corruption, to prevent sayings that corruption is rooted in a long time, for centuries in Bulgaria. This is not an expression that I want to be referenced to Bulgaria because Bulgarians are specific people for me- like all of you, people that I see on the street, people I know and I am sure they do not deserve that assessment.

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