

CONNECTIONS

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Bulgaria and ESDI/CESDP: No Problem for Us?

*Plamen Pantev*¹

Bulgaria is a non-European Union (EU) and a non-NATO country. It has common aspirations with other states that share a similar “non-institutional” status. However, the “common approach” of these nations striving for memberships in the two organizations has to be set against the essentially “unique” position of each of the candidate states. Bulgaria is a case in point. In some areas, its claims to dual membership are similar to those of a number of central and eastern European countries. In others, its claims are special. What makes Bulgaria comfortable about its adjustment efforts to both NATO and the EU defense activity is its record of cooperation with the two institutions throughout the 1990s and up to today—and the clear domestic support for the country’s integration into the Alliance and the Union. Bulgaria was a reliable Western European Union (WEU) associate partner and has committed forces, answerable to the WEU, and has been a significant actor on defense issues within the EU’s Maastricht context. It participated in the sanctions regime implementation against the Former Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) by the WEU on the Danube.

During Bulgaria’s accession negotiations with the Union in 2000, the chapter on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), i.e., on future involvement in a more active engagement in security and defense issues, was one of the first to be successfully closed. At the EU Defense Ministerial meeting of 21 November 2000, Bulgaria, as an applicant country for EU membership, replied positively to the invitation made at the Feira meeting of the European Council to make its own contribution, in the form of a complementary commitment, to improve European defense capabilities. This will add value to and strengthen, if only as modestly as the country’s potential provides for at present, the EU’s intervention capability in particular circumstances in the future. Furthermore, Bulgaria has agreed to allow evaluation of those contributions by the EU according to the same criteria as those applied to the members of the Union itself.

Bulgaria’s record of cooperation with NATO is no less impressive. Starting with membership on the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, through a very active engagement in the Partnership for Peace and the Euro- Atlantic Partnership Council, it then participated in SFOR, supporting NATO’s “Allied Force” operation in 1999, joining KFOR and UNMIK post-conflict peacekeeping and reconstruction efforts, implementing the MAP and PARP. All these efforts have created mutual trust and respect between Bulgaria and its new international partners, and tested that relationship with positive results. Bulgaria has been clearly named the “most allied non-ally country” by the highest ranking U.S. military officer, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the American armed forces.

¹ Dr. Plamen Pantev is Director of the Institute for Security and International Studies (ISIS) in Sofia. The views expressed in this article reflect his non-governmental expert opinion in his capacity as an associate of ISIS.

As is the case with other candidate countries, the most serious issues to be overcome on Bulgaria's way to joining NATO's ESDI and EU's CESDP are the improvements in defense reform, the consolidation of democracy, and the development of a more vibrant market economy. Certainly, these are issues that Bulgarian society has been made aware of by the Government and the expert community. The Bulgarian public is conscious that more will have to be done if they are to be considered seriously for NATO membership in 2002, and for the successful completion of the accession negotiations with the European Union. However, Bulgaria has some particular issues that make its contribution to the European security debate distinctive.

The first is the question of the strategic doctrine within which Bulgaria's ESDI and CESDP involvement will operate. If it is going to be nuclear deterrence, then Bulgaria will definitely signal to its partners the popular interest in the elimination of nuclear weapons and in the establishment of an effective, comprehensive non-proliferation regime. If, on the other hand, the doctrine is to be a post-deterrence one, then it would be in Bulgaria's interest to have it achieved through the cooperation of all major deterrence players. Preventing a new arms race, including in space, respecting and strengthening existing disarmament and arms control treaties or their coordinated change—all of these are in Bulgaria's vital interest as a non-nuclear small country.

The second issue concerns the trans-Atlantic balance. Both the future EU crisis management model, in whose formation Bulgaria has been a loyal participant, and the present United States-led one are valued by the Bulgarians. Any exaggerated American doubts about the destabilizing effect on the trans-Atlantic link of the EU's political and defense project are of major concern for a newcomer like Bulgaria in both the Union and the Alliance.

The third issue is closer to home. Despite the improvements in the Western Balkans after the Kosovo crisis, especially since the beginning of democratic transitions in Croatia and in the FRY, there are clearly many problems remaining. Any claim by NATO or the EU for the need for a strong and stable Balkans region will remain ineffective in the immediate future in the absence of their strategic and institutional engagement with the countries of southeastern Europe. Bulgaria exists in and through the region of southeastern Europe and considers very seriously all that is said about, and done throughout, the Balkans.

The fourth issue is that Bulgaria would like to see better coordinated NATO-EU defense planning; it wishes to avoid being drawn into problematic relations that a relatively small country can hardly manage. The principle of the 'economy of organization' calls for integrated NATO-EU defense planning for the short-to-medium term. Involvement in information selection, sharing, and processing, whenever participating with a substantial force, as well as in the decision-making and command and control process is a "must" for both organizations in their relations with countries aspiring to dual membership.

The last major issue is the search for an acceptable formula for cooperation with Russia. A persistent and long-term Bulgarian activity is the pressure for Russia to

accept a cooperative basis for its relations with both the EU and NATO. Sending clear signals to Moscow that Bulgaria does not encourage or participate in the “encircling” or “excluding” of Russia has a special meaning for the country’s policy in the period of acceding to the Alliance and the Union.

Fully committed, Bulgaria has embarked on the NATO and EU integration process. It accepts that converting the existing problems into “no problem for us” is a predominantly Bulgarian task. It is in this confident and constructive spirit that the Bulgarian state, established in 681, views the new, third millennium.