

**THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AND THE EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY:
ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE**

SESSION 4: EUROPE 2020 AND THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP: FOCUS
ON EDUCATION, TRAINING, YOUTH AND EMPLOYMENT

8-9 December 2010, Brussels

Tanya Mihaylova, Acting Director of the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I am greatly honoured by the opportunity to speak before you today. I would like to thank the organizers, and in particular *Education and Culture Directorate* and the Jean Monet Programme, for inviting me and giving me an opportunity to share with you some thoughts on today's topic during this session.

Allow me to begin by drawing on a deeply felt conviction of the importance of being born in Europe – a conviction, which drives each of us forward in their life and inspires us to seek insight and continually transform our shared European values, striving to embed them ever more deeply into the very nature of our existence. Whether we talk about individuals or societies, embracing the core values that make us European takes time. Eastern Europe, which saw its links to mainstream European civilization artificially severed by the Iron Curtain, fell behind and both efforts and time are needed to make up for the delay as no overnight miracle cures are readily available.

In my speech I would therefore like to focus on two areas into which, in my opinion, efforts should be channeled – the Eastern European Partnership and diplomatic training in the context of the European External Action Service (EEAS).

1. The Eastern Partnership

Bulgaria has an enduring interest in fostering strong links of cooperation between the European Union and its Eastern and Southern neighbours in the future. It also neighbours some of the countries I refer to and, therefore, considers it essential that the European Neighbourhood Policy remains the main framework for cooperation. To the extent we regard the Eastern Neighbourhood policy of the European Union as a priority and taking into account that the Black Sea is a natural continuation of the Mediterranean region, I would like to highlight the complementary nature of the Southern and Eastern dimensions of the policy. Antagonism between them or competition for funds should not have a place in this context.

The Eastern Partnership and Black Sea Synergy should play an equally important role within the framework of ENP. The two initiatives have the potential to act as tools of transformation within the process of EU-wide convergence. Having said this, following the launch of the Eastern Partnership the Black Sea Synergy has lost momentum and few initiatives are being implemented on the ground. Earlier this year, Bulgaria voiced its concern in this regard in a joint letter sent by the Foreign Ministers of Bulgaria, Romania and Greece to the HR for Foreign and Security Policy Mrs. Ashton and the Commissioner for Enlargement Mr. Štefan Füle. The furtherance of the Black Sea Synergy as a regional initiative should be pursued within the framework of a new Strategy for the Black Sea backed up by proper institutional and financial support.

The success of the Eastern partnership depends on a much stronger engagement of the European Union with security issues, for example in the countries in the South Caucasus region. Trust could be fostered and enhanced by implementing well designed and targeted projects.

Ten days ago I had an opportunity to participate in a workshop organized for middle-ranking diplomats from 20 countries primarily in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. I decided to conduct a survey amongst the representatives of 5 of the 6 countries participating in the Eastern Partnership – Azerbaijan, the Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Belarus. I asked the representatives of each country three questions: (1) “What do you know about the initiative?”; (2) “How it is viewed given the absence of a clear national vision of your country becoming a EU member?”; and (3) “What specific projects in the framework of the initiative are you aware of?”. Naturally, the results of the survey are far from representative. However, it should be noted that the answers were in a consistently similar vein, that is the initiative was seen as highly positive but respondents were not aware of any specific projects. The answers to the second question indicated that “despite there being no clear commitment to future EU membership the initiative was still an opportunity to foster stronger links between countries”. Marginally extreme opinions were also voiced: “we do not want to join EU, but we are happy that national roads, for example, to be built by someone else”. What did I learn from this mock survey? In the first place, I realised that the EU itself should better define its own position on and criteria for extending a helping hand to third countries because its contribution to all aspects of their societies is more diverse and wide-reaching than mere financial assistance. This includes sharing values, which should be embraced and somehow imposed on societies from the outside. Bulgaria openly wanted and warmly embraced the fundamental change of building a market economy and a state based on the fundamental principles of respect for human rights and democracy. These values may not be superimposed without a strong will and commitment at national level.

I would also like to highlight that all EU neighbourhood policies are naturally eastbound and this applies equally to both the Black Sea Synergy and the Eastern Partnership, with Russia gaining increasing importance as a factor. Realities vis-à-vis our relations with Russia have changed, particularly in the context of the country’s role within G-20, relations with NATO and in the area of energy security. This should be taken into account and more pragmatic steps should be taken in order to strengthen cooperation between the European Union and Russia.

A year ago, immediately prior to the launch of the initiative, dissenting voices were heard according to which the EU was supporting political clans of a dictatorial bent instead of focusing its efforts on spreading the gospel of democracy further afield in the East. However, a worse scenario would have entailed the total absence of dialogue.

Despite the delay of the Eastern Partnership initiative no time is better than the present, particularly with the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, to demonstrate whether the EU is capable of rising up to the challenge of becoming a global player by agreeing on a common foreign policy, including towards Russia, and offering countries in Eastern Europe a long-term commitment to integration into the EU. This is particularly important because besides EU, Russia is also important factor for the development of Eastern Europe.

Bulgaria has specific know-how with a strong practical bias in the Black Sea region and equally enduring historical links to most Eastern Partnership countries, which have developed and thrived over many centuries. In the light of this, I am particularly pleased that a Bulgarian have been appointed as the new EU Ambassador to Georgia, which is one of the six Eastern Partnership countries.

2. As I have touched upon the diplomatic representation of the European Union, please allow me to also comment on the **European External Action Service in the light of the work of the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute.**

The efforts of BDI, which I have the honour to serve in the capacity as a Director, are focused on developing relevant training programmes that cover broad aspects of diplomacy and geared primarily to the training needs of junior Bulgarian and foreign diplomats. These efforts are consistently underlined by an attempt to build and promote a high level of professionalism across the diplomatic service. However, achieving this goal, particularly in the area of diplomacy, is impossible unless we act with responsibility towards the world, as well as with intellectual courage and creativity.

I would venture a guess that the schools and academies of diplomacy in all EU Member States implement staff and career development policies geared towards ensuring that the new European External Action Service is launched effectively and successfully. I mention this as I believe that the necessary level of competence and professional skills of the staff to be appointed to EEAS may be ensured solely by advance training at national level. In fact, the training nominated professionals are going to receive at national level represents the contribution of each national diplomatic service to building a highly efficient European diplomatic service.

Reflecting upon our responsibility at national and European level, each school of diplomacy should deploy a comprehensive policy in the area of expert training, laying an emphasis on the skills of those professionals who will join the EU diplomatic service.

It is further necessary to align the methods and goals of training programmes to national priorities and to the need to reinforce expert capacity in the foreign policy domain. This creates many a dilemma in the planning of training programmes geared to enhance the skills and qualifications of national diplomats in the short- and-long term. It is clear that our first and most imminent task is to train and nominate the first national representatives who will join the Service from the ranks of current diplomatic staff across Member States. In this sense, a strictly individual approach should be taken to each position. The most appropriate candidate for each position should be sought at national level. This has a strong bearing on the role of schools of diplomacy, and in particular the way in which they are able to assist candidates prepare and do well during the selection process. This represents a new approach for schools of diplomacy, which traditionally facilitate the professional training of groups of diplomats at substantially similar stages in their career. In this sense, it is important that we embrace this new professional challenge to our own flexibility and ability to adapt to changing professional training needs and policies. Essentially, this entails a shifting of our training focus and viewpoint. For example, to date we have reflected upon the format and content of junior diplomat training programmes. Our current task requires us to shift the focus of training so as to ensure it is well matched to the individual profile of the trainee – their individual knowledge and skills – so as to be able to design a tailored training programme, which would allow them to pass the competition phase prior to being appointed to the Service. Indeed, preparing Bulgarian candidates for the process of staff selection with a view to the forthcoming appointments to the EEAS.

In the context of our long-term policy on professional training, this shift of focus is less tangible as training programmes are comprehensively geared to primarily address training needs in the area of European integration, which is seen as a top priority.

With regard to the next steps to be taken with regard to the training of the diplomats to be appointed to EEAS, it would be reasonable if the Service itself offered possibilities for training immediately prior to posting diplomats overseas that is strongly focused on EU policies in all areas. This is particularly relevant to senior diplomats or, in the case of lower-ranking diplomats, to specific areas of expert knowledge. To this end, the Service should build capacity for staff training and develop concrete programmes. As the criteria for staff appointment and overseas postings remain to be finalised, the two processes can take place in parallel to ensure that both important aspects are covered. A good step in this regard would be circulating questionnaires to experienced institutes and academies engaged in the training of diplomats in Member States in order to determine and select the programmes and methodologies that would be best suited to this purpose.

3. I would like to give a specific example by drawing on the work of our Institute in the area of neighbourhood and regional cooperation.

In 2005, two years after the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute was established and two years before Bulgaria's accession to the European Union, we launched, with the support of the German foundation Hanns Seidel, a Winter School of Diplomacy as an initiative geared to attract young diplomats from Southeastern Europe, and more specifically the West Balkans and the Black Sea regions. Approximately 150 young diplomats from practically all countries in the two regions (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Turkey, Greece, Romania, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) have completed training programmes at our Institute mainly in areas relating to EU policies and regional cooperation.

This form of training was launched on the basis of a clear recognition that cooperation and shared opportunities, including as a problem-solving instrument, are underlined by communication and dialogue. We have kept up the initiative for five years being fully convinced of its value as a platform for open discussion between representatives of all countries on topical issues within the framework of bilateral and multilateral relations. In doing so, we make consistent efforts to build mutual trust and overcome or at least reduce historical and political prejudice and identify common interests and long-term goals. The success of the initiative over the past five years has also allowed us to build a network of young diplomats on the basis of personal contacts, mutual understanding and trust. The programme is primarily structured around discussions between participants with formal lectures taking a backseat. This allows the main issues and controversies to be identified in the framework of a dialogue, which allows all points of view to be presented so that a clear picture of the situation in both regions, the priorities of individual countries and their common interests emerges.

I would also like to share some of the main conclusions from discussions over the years. Young diplomats agree on the fundamental importance of regional cooperation for stability and security in their countries, which is sometimes undermined by bilateral conflicts. Solution seeking should be underlined by a commitment to compromise. In addition to the readiness of politicians to make concessions in the context of bilateral relations, it is also necessary to work on bringing about a change in public opinion and commonly held views in each country.

In their view regional stability should be considered in the wider Eurasian context. The role of the US and Russia in guaranteeing regional stability remains essential. The EU, alongside NATO, will assume an increasingly important role in maintaining stability in the future. The countries in the region regard NATO and the EU as their principal partners. The prospect of EU membership remains a decisive driver for the continuation of democratic reforms in the region.

This creates a need to shift the focus on other forms of cooperation with the EU – the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) whose principal goal is EU membership in the long-run; the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), excluding fostering greater institutional links; and the Black Sea Synergy – a notably cautious approach to the region, which facilitates the process of finding solutions to frozen conflicts and drives continued democratic reforms.

These conclusions demonstrate the importance of promoting and supporting institutionalized regional cooperation – a policy the European Union pursues along its borders with neighbouring countries. At the time this was and today remains the main rationale for the training programmes conducted for the benefit of countries in Southeastern Europe and the Black Sea region.

On the basis of this experience, the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute – individually or jointly with partners from other member States – could continue to contribute in specific such as the training of representatives of the Eastern Partnership countries, including diplomats, civil servants and representatives of the non-governmental sector, particularly in view of the important role of civil society organizations in areas of potential conflict where intergovernmental cooperation is fraught with difficulty. The Civil Society Forum within the Eastern Partnership provides an excellent platform for the exchange of experience and ideas to be brought to the attention of decision- and policy-makers from the EU and partner countries.

And finally,

Allow me to conclude by saying that Bulgarian society has gone a long way towards embracing European values and in the process of learning many a difficult lesson has gained valuable and unique experience and perspective, which it is willing to share both with our neighbours from Southeastern Europe and the countries in the Black Sea region. The Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute has been an active player in this process. In order to ensure it is capable of carrying out its functions, BDI has built a strong team of professionals selected on the basis of stringent professional requirements and full commitment to European values. Whilst remaining fully engaged in the professional training of diplomats, we continue to expand the horizon of our own knowledge in line with the motto of our Institute – *DOCENDO DISCIMUS* (By teaching, we learn).

Thank you for your attention.