

**Intervention by Minister Pavlova before the CCC**  
**12 December, Strasbourg**

**1. Introduction**

**2. Future of Europe**

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- Cohesion
- Institutional files
- Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)
- Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)
- Environment, Climate
- Youth
- Education and Culture

**3. Western Balkans**

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**4. Security and Stability**

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- Energy
- Foreign affairs – EU as a global actor (defence, global strategy, trade)

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- Digital single market
- Transport – mobility package

- Industry
- Services package
- Social
  - Including gender balance (women)

## **6. Conclusions**

## Introduction

### Political context

- Thank you. The European Parliament is a key partner representing EU citizens and I look forward to working with the European Parliament.
- The well-established tradition of the Conference of Committee Chairs and the Council Presidency to discuss and exchange views on the agenda of the European Union at the beginning of the new Presidency is an opportunity we highly value.
- There is a challenging programme ahead of us in the next semester.
- We are well aware that the high number of important legislative files on the agenda and the approaching end of the term of the EU institutions place high pressure and dynamism on our work.
- We are motivated to do our utmost to move the legislative programme of the EU institutions forward in an effective, constructive, and transparent manner.
- We will rely on the open and ongoing dialogue with all the Committees in the European Parliament to achieve as much as possible.
- This year Bulgaria celebrates 10 years of its accession to the EU, and it is a great honour for us to hold the Presidency now.
- In the past years the EU has been focused on responding to crises. **Now is the moment to assess the long-term perspectives** and to be pro-active, rather than reactive. To address the real concerns of our citizens and transformations in our economy and society.
- We are aware that this is an important moment for the EU with regard to the many challenges ahead of us. The good point is that after Brexit the majority of European citizens are optimistic and their trust in the EU institutions is growing. So we have **a positive momentum to achieve real progress both on our internal policies, and in our international relations.**

- If we want to achieve the ambition of the EU to be a global actor, according to its Global Strategy, it is more than ever a necessity for the EU to be united in order to be stronger on the inside and outside.
- Against this background, the EU needs to
  - Externally, take a leading role to support peace and stability, and the multilateral systems: Climate, WTO, UN
- Continue to be a responsible global stakeholder, promoting the multilateral rules-based order, and developing globally coordinated responses with international and regional organisations, states and non-state actors.
  - Internally: the EU needs to be united and show that it can deliver solutions for its citizens.
- So the EU institutions need to work together, and the Bulgarian Presidency needs and counts on the support of the European Parliament so that we can achieve jointly our common objectives.
- The Presidency has a key role in the Council: to coordinate and bridge the existing differences not only between member states, but also between sectors.
- You, the Chairs of the Committees, have the same essential role in the European Parliament, and we will rely on you to help bridge the gaps, build understanding, and again: **deliver for our 500 million citizens.**
- Last but not least: 2018 is the last full year before the European Parliament elections. With only 18 months until then, at which voters will be able to judge our collective effectiveness, we need to show that Europe can deliver for its citizens.
- Our Presidency is fully aware of this and will work hard to make progress towards the adoption of key legislation.
- In relation to this the timely adoption of the next EU budget is also quite important. Therefore, the debate over the next MFF will be in focus during the Bulgarian Presidency.
- *United We Stand Strong* is the motto of our Presidency.

## **Bulgarian Presidency programme**

The programme is based on the main challenges the EU faces today: the future of Europe, Brexit, migration, digital, youth unemployment...

- It is inspired also by exchanges with MEPs (exploratory talks were held already in July, political group leaders visited Sofia on 21 November)
- Strategic agenda of the European Council
- Rome declaration 25/3/2017
- Leaders' agenda

### **Priority 1: Future of Europe and youth**

#### **Let me start with the first Priority: the future of Europe and young people**

The trends present a number of challenges to the EU for the next twelve years.

- Economic growth and social cohesion are key to the Future of Europe.
- **The European economy is speeding up** – more jobs are being created, investments are growing, public finances are becoming stronger.
- Still, **some difficulties remain** – a high level of debt, small increase in salaries, unemployment among young people.
- We shall overcome these challenges together.
- The future of the EU is to **continue the efforts for social cohesion**.
- The Bulgarian Presidency is fully committed to moving ahead on this priority and to a constructive cooperation with the Parliament.

#### ***Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) post-2020***

- The future MFF will have to reflect all the challenges, so we should have the right tools to address them.
- The key difficulty here:

- We need more funds to address the new risks – migration, climate, cyber.
  - Due to Brexit, we have a budget gap.
- We need a reform of the next EU budget regarding:
  - Own resources
  - Flexibility
  - Simplification
  - Transparency and visibility to EU citizens.
- The Bulgarian Presidency will work for an active and constructive debate on the Multiannual Financial Framework.
  - The Commission announced its aim to table proposals for the post-2020 MFF in May 2018.
  - In February a debate between Leaders will kick off discussions.
  - **In March, we will host a high-level conference in Sofia on the MFF post 2020** to give clear political signals for the areas of common interests and the elements of agreement and disagreement.
- We take into account the willingness of the Parliament and the Commission for fast track negotiations and we will initiate immediately the examination of the proposal.
- We will **work closely with the upcoming Presidencies** to ensure continuity and consistency of the discussions on the proposal in view of the challenge to have agreement on the next EU budget and the relative legislative files to be adopted before the 2019 elections.

### *Cohesion Policy*

- The cohesion policy provides a real added value for EU citizens and is the EU's most important policy instrument for convergence and investment vehicle for growth and jobs in terms of available funding.

- For example, as a result of cohesion policy support. after accession Bulgaria's GDP increased from 41% of the EU27 average in 2007 to 48% as of today.
- Cohesion policy is not limited to regional disparities and underdevelopment, but it is also a strategy for promoting innovation, competitiveness and sustainable growth.
- However, we all recognise that there is room for improvement. The **main topics to be discussed** on the future of cohesion policy include its **scope and priorities** and **EU added value investments**, its **link with structural reforms**, and **simplification** which is the absolute key.
- The Bulgarian Presidency intends to bring forward the discussion on cohesion policy post 2020 in the Council and thereby contribute to the preparation of **the new regulatory framework for the policy**, to be presented by the Commission in 2018.
- To this end, we have several meetings dedicated to this topic including a **GAC on cohesion on 12 April** and a **high level conference on 8 June**.

### *Institutional issues*

- 2018 is the last year before the EU elections. So we have a number of institutional issues to address as well.
- Among the files are: Regulations on the European political parties and European political foundations, on the European Citizen's Initiative; Decision on the EP composition.
- The Bulgarian Presidency also places emphasis on strengthening the inter-institutional cooperation and is committed to carry forward the work for concluding the Inter-Institutional Agreement on the Transparency Register.

### *Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post-2020*

- The Commission announced its aim to table proposals for the post-2020 CAP towards mid-2018.
- I can nevertheless say that the **Council will actively contribute to the preparation of those proposals**. I am referring in particular to numerous policy debates planned for Council meetings and for the informal meeting in the first semester of 2018.
- The Presidency will intend to place the emphasis **on preserving the CAP budget and on the effectiveness of the instruments** of the current CAP.

### *Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)*

- **Deepening of the EMU**
  - The Bulgarian Presidency will also promote the discussions on the deepening of the EMU.
  - We expect the European Council to set this week the timelines and priorities so we can work on the EMU architecture, and the objectives for the medium-term horizon - namely by 2025.
- **Completing the Banking Union**
  - We need to ensure that our economy is resilient. Completing the Banking Union is essential.
  - We will work to find a balance between risk sharing (European Deposit Guarantee Scheme) and risk reduction (risk reduction package - RRM)
  - We hope that a coalition can be formed quickly in Germany; France has already shown willingness to move forward.
  - We hope that the co-legislators will be in a position to start the trilogues on Risk Reduction Measures already in the first half of 2018.
- **Building the Capital Market Union.**
  - We will work on all of the files as a matter of priority, including the Pan-European Personal Pension Product.
- **Taxation**



- In the area of taxation, the Bulgarian Presidency will focus on the fight against tax fraud, tax evasion and avoidance in order to ensure fair and efficient taxation.
- The fair taxation package for the creation of a single VAT area in the EU, starting with the gradual establishment of a definitive VAT System, is among our priorities.
- **The European Semester**
  - The Bulgarian Presidency will strive to ensure the smooth implementation of the 2018 cycle for economic policy coordination - the European Semester.

### *Environment and Climate*

- Preserving our environment is vital for the future of Europe.
- The environment is relevant for all sectors: transport, agriculture, industry, etc.
- We must strive to maintain the balance in all legislative files, not only the ones strictly related to the environment.
- As a matter of priority, we will work intensively on the packages on Delivering on Circular Economy and Greening of the European Semester.
- The year 2018 also marks **a milestone in the international climate arena** with the COP24<sup>1</sup> and the dialogue on the progress under the Paris Agreement.
- The EU will keep its decisive and leading stance on **the implementation of the Paris Agreement**.

### *Culture*

- **2018 is the European year of Cultural Heritage.**

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<sup>1</sup> Conference of Parties (COP)

- As a **country with rich cultural heritage**, Bulgaria sees a particular significance that its Presidency will take place in this context. We plan a **wide range of cultural events** for our Presidency, which we want to **share with citizens**.
- European Heads of State and Government this November in Gothenburg have recognised the **importance of culture for our European identity**. Today, more than ever, **culture could play an important role**. In addition to **connecting European citizens**, it builds the future of our Union by increasing the sense of belonging to a common European space and promoting European identity.
- Thus, we should strengthen the **ties between culture and citizens** by expanding the successful initiatives and EU programmes that focus on these as a core (such as Creative Europe and Europe for Citizens), supported by the EU as instruments to build and promote our diverse European culture, common identity and the European project as a whole.

### *Young people*

- Just like the environment, youth is not related only to specific files or legislation. It is a priority we need to promote across all sectors, and all our initiatives.
- It is very important to our Presidency, and in fact to prepare our programme we have held numerous events with young people, to understand their needs, and their vision for the Future of Europe.
- Because **it is their Europe**.
- The Presidency considers **Europass and the European Solidarity Corps** as a **key dossiers** and will co-operate closely with the Parliament with the aim of reaching an agreement on the legislative proposal by early 2018.

**When talking about a united Europe, we should not forget that the Western Balkans need a clear European perspective and connectivity between them and with the Member states.**

- In the light of security, stability and prosperity in the region, the **second Priority** of the Bulgarian Presidency is the **European perspective and connectivity of the Western Balkans.**
- The ambition of the Bulgarian Presidency is to achieve a **clear action plan** with each of the countries, without creating unrealistic expectations, but with concrete steps.
- We have to make sure that during this Commission’s mandate “irreversible progress” in each Western Balkans country’s **EU perspective is achieved**, in order to leave an important legacy, to be further consolidated, to the next Commission.
- We thus need to adjust our policy, in order **to keep the dynamism of the process, to enhance our support to the pro-European leadership and civil society in the region and to strengthen the credibility of our commitment.** In this regard, the February Strategy of the Commission represents a fundamental tool to shape an upgraded enlargement policy for the Western Balkans that can guide us in the years ahead.
- This is the way to have long lasting **peace, security and prosperity** in the region.
- The goal is to provide **connectivity** to the Western Balkan countries – **transport, communication, energy, educational and digital.**
- Bulgaria invests consistent efforts in this direction, for example by **promoting the digital policies** of the EU among the countries in the Western Balkans through **gradual reduction of roaming charges** and by **increasing the possibilities for broadband internet access.**
- **Enlargement** and the Western Balkans will be recurring themes during our Presidency:
  - The Commission will present a Western Balkans strategy and its regular Enlargement Package, leading to the adoption of Council

conclusions in June 2018.

- On 17 May, we will host an EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia.
- We hope that this intense agenda will **send a positive signal to the Western Balkans and their citizens**, make their EU perspective more tangible and advance our practical cooperation.
- The Presidency attaches great importance to the **credibility** of the Enlargement and the **Stabilisation and Association Processes** and will support the region in conducting EU-oriented reforms.
- We expect to see **real progress on the fundamentals, namely on the reforms in the area of rule of law and on the socio-economic reforms**.
- At the same time, we support constructive initiatives which reinforce inclusive **regional cooperation** and **strengthen good-neighbourly relations, which are equally important**.

<h3>Priority 3: Security and Stability</h3>
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- According to the latest results of Eurobarometer, **the top 2 issues of concern for EU citizens are terrorism and migration**.

#### *Internal security*

- **Terrorism and internal security**
  - The terrorist threat is sadly still very present; **fighting terrorism, preventing radicalisation and increasing the resilience** of our societies will be an absolute priority for our Presidency.
  - The cooperation with the European Parliament's special committee on counterterrorism - TERR - is already working very well. We are looking forward to the report to be delivered in September next year.
  - The key issues to be addressed here are **information exchange, information management and interoperability of IT-systems** as well as **border-management**.

- We look forward to the proposals on interoperability by the Commission due today. We will start the technical examination immediately, with the aim of reaching the general approach next June.
- We hope that the European Parliament will also deal with this file as a matter of priority and will be ready to enter into trilogues this year.

### ***Migration***

- Migration issues remain high on the agenda of EU, and therefore of our Presidency. We are also a frontline member state so we understand the issues better than anyone.
- Although the number of migrants arriving in the EU overall have decreased, we will continue to follow developments very closely, in particular in the Mediterranean Sea.
- Leaders discussed migration in October, and will again this week at the European Council to identify the key strands of work on the external dimension. These include the need to:
  - stem the flows on the Central Mediterranean route
  - improve conditions in the detention centres in Libya and facilitate voluntary returns
  - strengthen the EU Trust fund for Africa
  - do our utmost to help the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to create UN-operated open protection centres in Libya
  - continue the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement
  - enhance returns of irregular migrants through actions at EU level and strengthen cooperation with key third countries.
- Real cooperation with countries of origin and transit, particularly in Africa, is yet to be attained. We need to redouble efforts and harness the outcomes of

the recent 5th AU-EU Summit, notably its statement on migration, to unlock the long-lasting impasse on returns and readmissions.

### *Asylum*

- Intensified work on external aspects should **go hand in hand with strengthening the EU's internal mechanisms.**
  - In 2016 we started negotiations on the reform of the **Common European Asylum System (Dublin)**. Thorough and in-depth discussions were held by **four** consecutive Presidencies.
  - **It's time to reach an agreement.** An agreement that will set the necessary changes and that will provide for **unity and effectiveness.**
  - In this regard, the Bulgarian Presidency will strive to finalise the work with the European Parliament on the legislative proposals that are already in the negotiation phase at the beginning of our term and will aim to conclude the discussions in the Council on the remaining ones and enter into negotiations with the European Parliament as soon as possible.
- A final word on the Schengen Information System (SIS) legislative package, ETIAS and the ENTRY/EXIT systems: negotiations are underway and hopefully an agreement can be reached before the end of the year. Our Presidency stands ready to build on the work done by the current Presidency.

### *Cybersecurity*

- The Estonian Presidency delivered a high-level political response to the Commission's cybersecurity package, in the form of Council Conclusions. Our task will be to ensure it is done in practice.
- We will also continue examining the proposal on the "EU Cybersecurity Agency" - ENISA and certification ("Cybersecurity Act") where we aim for a general approach within our Presidency.
- **As part of our priorities on security and stability,** we will also work

towards strengthening the EU's role as a global actor, ensuring the EU has an independent and well-functioning energy market, and improving the legal framework to ensure that our citizens have access to fair, effective and fast judicial systems (key files in the area of justice are the Brussels II regulation, cross-border access to e-evidence, and institutionalisation of the European Public Prosecutor's office).

### *Common Foreign and Security Policy*

- Bulgaria will proactively support the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the **implementation of the EU Global Strategy** which provides a coherent framework for the EU's external relations.
- Our Presidency will focus on the Western Balkans, but will also build on the achievements of the Eastern Partnership and promote the visibility of the Danube and Black Sea regions.
- In the **Southern Neighbourhood** the overarching objective will be the continuation of the efforts to achieve **long-term sustainable stability**. We will further promote the negotiations with our Southern Partners on Partnership Priorities in the framework of a revised European Neighbourhood Policy.
- We will take forward the work to develop an inclusive and ambitious Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the implementation of concrete modules and projects.
- We will continue the work on further **strengthening the EU-NATO cooperation** based on the Joint Declaration from 2016.
- The Bulgarian Presidency will support the **security, capacity building and resilience in the Western Balkans** countries.

### *Defence (ITRE)*

- Regarding the European Defence Industrial Development Programme

(EDIDP): thanks to the efforts of the Estonian Presidency, significant progress has been made on the proposal and the Council's General Approach is scheduled for agreement today, 12 December, at the General Affairs Council.

- We are well aware that the Parliament also attaches great importance to this file, and the Bulgarian Presidency is looking forward to constructive discussions with the European Parliament at your earliest convenience.

### *Development (DEVE)*

- The EU and its Member States must continue to lead the implementation phase of the 2030 Agenda.

### *Trade (INTA)*

- After Brexit the world is looking on to see if the EU can actually be an effective partner. So far we have delivered – successful negotiations have taken place with Canada (CETA) and Japan. We need to continue and use the momentum for all trade agreements on the table: Singapore, Vietnam, Japan, Mercosur, Australia, and New Zealand.
- However, we must also ensure that the interests of citizens and industries are safeguarded – **trade needs to be fair**.
- In this context we welcome the agreement reached with the EP on the modernisation of trade defence instruments.
- The next key priority in this area is the screening of investments; we look forward to working with you on this important file.
- We will aim to align as far as possible the timeline of discussions in the Council with the EP planning.

### *Energy (ITRE)*

- Building the Energy Union is a strategic objective – for economic reasons, but maybe even more importantly, for geopolitical considerations.



- That is why the clean energy package is of utmost priority for us – it will improve the EU’s independence, and at the same time allow us to harness the potential of renewable energies, and help us achieve our 2030 climate goals.
- The package is unprecedented in size and complexity, but the Council has made progress, and the Bulgarian Presidency will aim to continue, or even increase the high pace:
  - As you know, two trilogue sessions were held already on the draft Directive on the energy performance of buildings.
  - We look forward to the launch of trilogue negotiations on the draft **energy efficiency** Directive soon.
  - On the draft Regulation on **risk preparedness in the electricity sector**, a general approach has already been reached.
  - As regards the remaining five proposals, the Estonian Presidency aims to achieve general approaches on these files at the 18 December Council meeting.
- We hope that this will enable us to start trilogue negotiations with the EP on these legislative proposals early next year. **We count on you, as we will need to work together as fast as possible, if we are to achieve real results in this area.**

#### Priority 4: Digital & skills

- This priority is about competitiveness – it covers the internal market and **Social Europe**.
- But we have put the emphasis on **Digital Europe**, because that is the **biggest challenge for the Single Market**, and at the same time the biggest opportunity.

#### *Digital - legislation*

- The Digital Single Market has been a top priority for the Estonian Presidency and they have achieved a lot here. I know the European Parliament has been extremely constructive, in fact trilogues continue on many of the files this week
- The Parliament and the Council have so far adopted six of the proposals of the Digital Single Market Strategy.
- The European Council has recently provided further political impetus by calling for fast-track work on the proposals on copyright, the Digital Content Directive, audio-visual media services, parcel delivery, the free flow of non-personal data and the electronic communications code.
- And yet, a lot remains to be done. Digitalisation is no longer a choice, but a reality, and we must keep up the pace with fast developing digital technologies. Any additional delays would harm our citizens, businesses and economies. Only with the determined commitment of all, we can make a functional Digital Single Market a reality.
- One of the biggest impediments of the Digital Single Market is fragmentation – at EU level, at national level, and even within companies.
- We will work hard as Presidency to overcome those – administrative, and sometimes artificial – divisions across Council formations, and I count on your support, as Committee chairs, to help us overcome any divisions across the committees in the EP.
- We will strive to reach a political agreement with you on the following key files: Electronic Communications Code and BEREC, Audio-visual Media Services Directive, free flow of non-personal data, Contracts on Supply of Digital Content, and Single Digital Gateway.
- There are also a number of files where agreement has not been reached in the Council, but we will strive to make progress: two Copyright files; ePrivacy.
- Finally, we also have the newest proposals from the Commission on the table - Cybersecurity, Free flow of Data – as well as the expected new proposals, such as fake news and taxation of Digital companies.
- We must keep up - and even increase - the pace of our work in order to turn our political commitments into reality. The Council's aim, set by the heads of

state and government, is to complete the Digital Single Market by the end of 2018, so we will count on you, your support and cooperation.

And digitalisation is **not all about legislation**. Bulgaria will work on and support key initiatives:

- The European Open Science Cloud<sup>2</sup> (EP own initiative report by Jerzy Buzek, chair ITRE)
- High-Performance Computing (HPC).

**To restore the European economy to its world leader status we need more than digitalisation however.**

Among our priorities, we will strive for:

- A robust **industrial policy**
  - Here, the council agrees with the EP that we need to go further than the recent Commission Communication.
  - We want to have a comprehensive EU industrial strategy with a focus on 2030 and beyond, including medium to long-term strategic objectives and indicators for industry, accompanied by an action plan with concrete measures.
- A modern and integrated transport sector
  - The **mobility package** is of utmost priority for us. It is extremely sensitive in all of our Member States, and in the Parliament as well, we need to find a balanced approach.
  - Nevertheless, I am sure you agree with me that modernisation of this sector is a strategic objective, and we will work with you to achieve it.

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<sup>2</sup> A new approach to the scientific process based on cooperative work and new ways of diffusing knowledge.

- Here, we must remember however that competitiveness cannot be an aim in itself – it is only a means to achieve our key objective, which is economic security and prosperity for our citizens.
- That is why the **social dimension** is important across all of these files.
- Member States also recognise the importance of Social Europe, as evidenced by the Gothenburg summit, and the proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The social dimension will be on the agenda on the European Council again this week.
- We must make use of this positive momentum. We have important legislation on the table: posting of workers, Social Security Coordination, Work–Life Balance and the European Accessibility Act.
- But again, it’s not all about legislation:
  - We need to implement the Social Pillar
  - We need to encourage and develop the right skills, so all our citizens can benefit from the Digital Revolution.

### Conclusions

- As you can see, we have our work cut out for us.
- This is a key moment for Europe, and with the European elections coming up, we have many files on the table
- I can assure you that Bulgaria will handle the Presidency with great responsibility.
- We want to work in a transparent and consensual manner – with all MS and institutions, and especially the European Parliament.
- You will be our strategic partner, and I am sure that together with you, we will make a lot of progress and deliver real benefits for our citizens.

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