

The Current Challenges and Major Priorities of Bulgaria's Defence Policy

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I am really grateful for the opportunity to deliver my first public lecture in my capacity of the Minister of Defence at "G.S.Rakovsky" Academy. The Academy apart from being the oldest higher military school in Bulgaria is one of the symbols of the modern Bulgarian State. Some of the most prominent figures in the Bulgarian history have mastered their military skills at the Academy. I do believe the civilian and military leaders who would in the future write Bulgaria's history are in the midst of its current students.

It is the well established tradition that requests from me to share with you my views on defence policy's priorities. It is my honor to address this highly esteemed audience since there is hardly a better place to introduce the new Government's vision in the field of defence. At the same time it would be disrespectful to the academic nature of the Academy if I do not challenge this very audience which, I believe, is brought up in the spirit of analytical thinking.

So today I will not be opening up with grand verbalizations on defence and foreign policy; I will not go into analyzing the world order and security problems. The reason for all this is neither intellectual weakness nor lack of impetus to debate. On the contrary, today, more than ever I am convinced that: defence is one of the major instruments in the realization of the Bulgarian foreign policy priorities; Bulgaria has to be part of united Europe's nucleus; and the engagements undertaken by her within NATO stem from the awareness of the risks and threats Bulgaria faces; and also new and unpredicted threats for whom we would have to be prepared will emerge.

However, today, such debates would not make sense provided we did not raise an issue that is much more closely related to our every day life. **The most important task we all face today is to do our homework - in the Ministry of Defence and the Bulgarian Armed Forces.** This is the priority and substituting

it by other issues would mean distracting the attention and diverting the resources in the wrong direction. This is why before dwelling upon the external threats the country faces as well as the role of the Armed Forces I would like first and foremost to focus my attention on Bulgaria.

We are facing a substantial crisis. It is not just financial, this is a crisis within the management systems of the Bulgarian society. It's obvious to everyone that planning and management have been replaced by promises and populist measures; and costly financial and human resources have been tenaciously used up. All that put together has gradually and quickly resulted in the defence sector's morale and integrity deterioration. This trend is intolerable and the new Government is determined to quickly put an end to it.

The current reality **provokes** not only the political leadership but all professionals in the defence field as well. That is why we will join our efforts and our actions will be resolute. Our success will facilitate us in doing our homework so that we meet the traditionally high expectations of the Bulgarians, as far as their own Armed Forces are concerned, as well as those of our NATO Allies.

Therefore, I would like to start by highlighting some of the major conclusions and assessments on the MoD status quo and the needed political and management actions aimed at defence and Armed forces development.

The **transformation** of the Bulgarian Armed Forces was started with the decision for NATO membership taken back in 1997 alongside with the most substantial product of this policy "Plan 2004". The core idea of the Plan was to make the AF compliant both with the new security environment as well as the objective economic reality. The transformation process aimed at (1) modernization of the MoD; (2) preserving military professionalism and (3) laying the basis of Armed Forces built up in accordance with the contemporary needs and thinking about defence in compliance with NATO standards. "Plan 2004" continues to be the cornerstone in the military transformation planning in Bulgaria. Regretfully, on the road to modern and effective Armed Forces, however, the goals were subjected to manipulation while the good governance principles were left behind.

- ***The Political Leadership was substituted by*** authoritarian and populist management while defence policy was turned into partisan clashes and financial interests arena;
- ***The Plan for Organization, Build-up and Modernization of the Armed Forces by 2015 was a failure*** from the very beginning. The lack of clear project prioritization and the lack of mid-term budgetary guarantees for

their funding lead to too many costly and not very wise decisions. As a result today we owe hundreds of million while we are unable to use even half of the acquired equipment;

- ***Transparency in government was replaced by complete obscurity*** – modern planning systems like defence resource management integrated system, the necessary operational capabilities system and the career development system were totally misplaced.

Refusing to introduce modern management based on analysis and transparency to society corroded the confidence between civilians and the military. All characteristics inherent to those who have devoted their lives to Bulgaria, namely – duty, honor, dignity, valor, loyalty, perseverance – have been on a daily basis been attacked by corruption and defence policy demoralization.

The effect is obvious to all – it becomes more and more difficult for the Armed Forces to keep their status quo of a moral standard for the nation, which was the heritage of the forefathers of contemporary Bulgaria.

Nowadays the institutional and moral decay is the biggest internal threat to the national security of Bulgaria. This is why the Government will undertake speeded and determined actions aimed at putting away all factors and conditions that negatively impact the system – factors such as corruption, misuse, unscrupulous protectionism and irresponsibility.

The political team of the Ministry of Defence, I am in charge of, has set three key priorities:

- ***To introduce management practices based on efficiency, honesty and openness;***
- ***Responsibility for the national security and the future of the Armed Forces, and***
- ***Respect for the people in the field of defence.***

In our actions, my colleagues and I would like to restore public justice, to revive the national sense of pride for belonging to a dignified and respected Armed Forces.

Practically it all means:

- ***Abandoning all*** non typical for defence economic, commercial and other functions and focusing on defence capabilities and operational readiness of troops and forces;

- **Relieving** the institution from dubious civil-military relations and putting an end to sponsorship by political parties, corrupt intermediaries and contractors;
- **Putting away** substitution of professionalism and morale by servility and pseudo-loyalty as criteria for successful promotion within the system.

As of today our strategic task is to align all our actions with building contemporary and adequate capabilities for Bulgaria. It all means a very difficult but necessary planning process at strategic level supported by deep analysis and reasonable alternatives.

This is the right place to mention that Bulgaria has not drafted yet its National Security Strategy that would outline the contemporary challenges and the ways and means to cope with them, to find an adequately place for the country in the modern strategic environment and provide the necessary conceptual background for the development of the integrated security sector. This is why the Government is determined to elaborate such a Strategy as a first step and based on it the National Military Strategy and the follow on background documents would be further elaborated.

For us capabilities integral planning for the whole national security sector means a new basis for the Armed Forces development .

In the coming years we would have to find answers to a great deal of hard issues. Some of them being:

- solving the issue of selecting a major fighter, otherwise as of 2012 we will be unable to guarantee our air sovereignty;
- making the Navy fully functional;
- prioritization of communications projects in the national security sector to avoid investments duplication and saving money;
- modernizing combat training;
- putting into place sustainable social policy that guarantees all of you welfare and options to choose;
- putting into place a unified military education, qualification and specialization system and avoiding constant political speculations with the military schools .

Coping with our internal challenges would make us effective in our actions against the risks of the surrounding environment – terrorism, organized crime, WMD proliferation, regional conflicts and failed states.

The issue of critical infrastructure defence is closely linked to guaranteeing continuity of vital resources supply. Bulgaria can work on it together with the EU and NATO but it's important for us to keep the focus on it. Plus there is a new phenomenon – cyber security. The example with cyber attacks on Estonia (2007) and Georgia (2008) is sufficient to take account of the fact we are facing a relatively new threat for which we would have to be prepared.

Although the importance of asymmetric threats is still growing the **risk of conventional armed conflicts** is not overcome yet. The disintegration processes in the Western Balkans are not over yet while in some areas of the Black sea and Caspian regions the disintegration potential of the so called frozen conflicts can be activated at any given moment. This is why Bulgaria has to be prepared to face even more unfavorable scenarios.

Bulgaria's location predefines her position as one of the major transit zones for **illegal trafficking** of people, weapons, drugs, etc. It all contributes to strengthening organized crime and to an increase in the corruption potential. More than that, migration flows establish prerequisites for terrorist cells infiltration. To that end the approach to guaranteeing border security should be an integrated one focusing on intergovernmental coordination.

More and more nowadays we have to take account of climate changes, natural disasters, industrial emergencies and the Armed Forces functions in similar circumstances.

Being aware of our internal challenges, considering the risks typical for the region we live in, we cannot neglect **the threats to global peace and security** and should face them where they emerge. Otherwise they would come to us. As a result it all requests for building up and developing defense capabilities in order to participate in operations often outside the national boundaries. This is where the first line of defence of national interests lies. This all incorporates the essence of Bulgaria's contingents' participation in operations and missions abroad. So the realization of Bulgaria's foreign policy priorities and the engagements undertaken as a NATO Ally and EU member request for a permanent development and increase of Armed Forces capabilities. To that end our defence policy is focused on maintaining, improving and ensuring conditions for effective use of the defence capabilities.

In order to have the necessary capabilities we should adequately plan their build up which brings us back to the beginning of today's lecture and the challenges we currently face. Our efforts are aimed at the realization of the outlined priorities in the program of the Government.

During its tenure the leadership of the Ministry of Defence is determined to achieve a qualitatively new defence system. To that end, we envisage a Defence Review, update and coordination with NATO of the realistic goals for the development of the Armed Forces as well as deadlines for their implementation in recession.

In order to achieve the outlined goals, our first and foremost task is to restore the effective oversight of the Ministry of Defence over defence resources management. From now on budget drafting and implementation will be separate as it is with most NATO states, in the name of effective management of the available and very often limited defence resources.

This is why our first steps were aimed at budget recovery in so as to ensure the needed capabilities of the Bulgarian Armed Forces for participation in operations, guaranteeing adequate salaries and welfare for the people engaged in defence.

Our next step will be to facilitate and make the integrated MoD model operational. To that end we would have to amend the Law on Defence and Armed Forces that was adopted just before the Parliamentary elections. We believe real integration should unite the military and civilian expertise under clear procedures and rules as well as decision making under efficient civilian and Parliamentary oversight.

Touching upon amendments to the legal basis I would like to point out that we would in the near future draft and adopt a Reserve Law as well the Public Tender Act regarding special public orders. It all results from our determination to have more accountability in defence management and more investment options in the most expensive resource – human capital.

Political ambitions are shaped based on the assessment of the security environment development now as well as in a long term perspective. Risks and threats in the future will be mostly external. Because of that our defence policy will be primarily focused on building up capabilities for participation in expeditionary operations. Our goal is to gradually add to the profile of Bulgarian participation in missions abroad. This will further promote the image of Bulgaria and will provide for additional argumentation in defending our foreign policy interests.

As of today, though, Bulgaria's ambitions are hampered but we would overcome gradually those obstacles such as insufficient interoperability with NATO Allies. Due to that the key challenge we face is enhancing the efficiency of defence resources management under expected economic recession.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight that we would have to be better prepared to benefit from our EU and NATO membership. The level of this development, though, depends on the national capacity to progress and self-improve. This is the guarantee the sustainable future of the state and effective defence of our national interests. Provided Bulgaria is willing to be an active member of the Euro-Atlantic community, we would have to take into account the fact it is based on shared values and responsibilities.

The people working in defence are namely the ones who contribute to the realization of Bulgaria's goals as an equal European partner.

I count on you and your understanding that professionalism alongside with principles and values are the road to success. I rely on your confidence in the future of the country and your readiness to serve in the name of the future development of prosperous Bulgaria.