

About the first Bulgarian Astronaut: Project of Richard Nixon and the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria (About the New orbit of cooperation with the United States)

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Sometimes history can delight a man. In such way I was delighted by Alexenia Dimitrova's discovery in 24 hours that Richard Nixon had wanted a Bulgarian on NASA's flight in space ever since 1972.

After Bulgaria's accession in the European Union and NATO, after entering the Antarctic Treaty and the permanent settlement of Bulgaria on the Antarctic, after the milestone visit of pope John Paul II (which cleared any suspicions about Bulgarian participation in the attack against him), the Atlantic Club had to formulate new or renewed long-lasting national priorities, creating national pride and visibility for our country.

Space! This is our new aim, which is new as much as it is old. The Bulgarian former glory in space exploration -- world's sixth space nation-- was supported by relations with the Soviet Union and ambitious Bulgarian scientists and military. With two heroic astronaut- Georgi Ivanov and Alexander Alexandrov – Bulgaria proudly led the charts for countries with highest number of astronauts per capita. It is time to prepare the third astronaut, taking advantage of our privileged cooperation with the United States, including the military field.

Space exploration is a costly matter especially in time of crisis. But the longest journey starts with one step, which is not always expensive. Consequently the Atlantic Club, supported by the Fund for Scientific Research in the Ministry of Education and Science, launches its new program "Space", which starts where the hardship usually lead us – from the law. We set the ambitious goal of gathering an international team to build up from the foundations of Bulgarian Space Law – which would lay the foundations of a European legal framework for the specific issue, in order to prepare a draft law for space.

Exploration of space – for civil, economic, communicative, touristic and military purposes – at the moment surpasses our imagination. Our lives and communication goes through space and we are becoming more dependent on it. Imagine that communications between Earth and Space cease for only 24 hours and you will receive apocalypse. With time this tendency of dependency is growing. In the same way ten years ago our parents did not suspect that today our politics will be passing through Brussels.

Today, when the world is becoming a victim from the pirates in the Indian ocean, we are wondering why didn't we take precaution earlier. Why piracy, which we thought had disappeared, surprised us? One of the reasons is that politics oftentimes acts in response to something instead of in order to prevent it. Even today there is no adequate legal framework to regulate piracy. For example the first Road Traffic Law was initiated after not before the first victim from a traffic accident.

Today we have acquired rich and bitter experience to learn from. Now we can lay the foundations of a legal framework regulating consequences and responsibilities in actions in space - including space accidents, space piracy and space terrorism. The terrorism from 11 September 2001 which is still Breaking News, would not miss a chance in expanding towards outer space even if it sounds hard to believe. Consider how until 11 September an attack with a commercial airplane sounded impossible.

Alright, as sceptics would say, the law will be accepted, but from where would we find astronauts. Our education and military lacks funding and the most talented Bulgarians go to the West. The truth is that whoever wants, can! A couple of students from an after-school group at Varna Observatory won NASA's competition for designing space stations. Furthermore, Vivacom and the Atlantic club made a public private partnership to support the students.

So, when I read Richard Nixon's plans to send a Bulgarian into space, I wonder how Americans select their presidents who were ahead in their thinking even from the Atlantic club in Bulgaria. It is obviously a question of democracy. I called the American Ambassador in Sofia James Worlick to ask him whether 38 years later the idea of Nixon and the Atlantic club of Bulgaria can now come into existence. His short and clear answer was: "I fully support it." Lastly, this would be the most obvious way to launch the Bulgarian-American partnership in the new orbit of cooperation.