

US-BG: Fraternal Friendship a Little Bit Put on Hold*

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A visit from the US Secretary of State is always good news. Such visit is a recognition of the host country and favors its relations with the USA, and let's be honest – it compliments the government. The added value of visits like that consists in an indirect stimulus for U.S. (and other) investments and tourism.

We clearly understood the U.S. priorities as emphasized during the meeting: energy security and diversification (of common interest to the USA and Bulgaria), shale gas (an issue on which Bulgaria's position changed multiple times), the open government programme (on which our country apparently never acted), the blockade on Syria. We've heard our joint military bases can be used more extensively in the future, which given the major U.S. military budget cutbacks is a really good news.

Both countries agreed their relations were excellent, for which their dynamic embassies deserve credit. By the way this is completely natural considering the evolution of the U.S.-Bulgarian relations through four wars we've won together liberating four nations on two continents, the 3 years in the Security Council and our presidency in the OSCE.

I happen to be among the few Bulgarians who worked directly or indirectly with four U.S. presidents since 1990: Bush Sr., Clinton, Bush Jr. and Obama. From my experience I can tell Americans are prone to giving sometimes. On three conditions though: being a decent state, knowing what you want and knowing how to ask for it. Bulgaria's accession to NATO in 2004 can be considered fulfilling the first requirement to a major extent. Or at least to an extent that doesn't stop Bulgarians from meeting greater expectations.

Unfortunately, no such expectations were mentioned during Hillary Clinton's visit to Bulgaria. Sadly, the last major project co-realized by the U.S. and Bulgaria was a decade ago back in 2003: the deployment of U.S. bases in our country (by the way the project's realization started together with our request for annulling U.S. visas for Bulgarians).

As I watched the press conference of PM Borisov and Mrs. Clinton, I thought to myself: why don't we ask for something future generations would thank us for 10-20 years from now?

There's so much that could be done!

It's true some projects brought losses we can't undo as the NATO anti-missile shield, no part of which will be placed in Bulgaria. We missed that. There are, however, so many high-tech fields we can cooperate in, e.g. the U.S. space programme. It has both defense and civil, as well as scientific research aspects. The space programme is yet to gain importance to mankind and an alliance with the U.S. is a long-term policy. Sending a Bulgarian astronaut to NASA would only be the most visible achievement in such cooperation. By far NASA has sent into space 45 astronauts from 15 partner countries and Bulgaria is comparable to them on many levels.

Expressing interest in participation in the F-35 programme (virtual as it may seem) might get us in this or another programme of the kind. There are 10 countries considered potential allies to the U.S. that were invited to join the team.

A special agreement on cyberdefense (NATO's new priority) can provide significant protection of the IT sector in Bulgaria.

Of course the U.S. could be our partner in various international fields that Bulgaria considers priority, e.g. membership in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) – the club of the best 40 economies. This is no easy goal but it isn't harder than the NATO or EU accessions. Attracting U.S. investments is a must. There are such but they are far from the potential a military political cooperation suggests.

The U.S. can surely help defending the interests of Bulgarian companies in international tenders under NATO in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo. Our NATO membership, as well as the EU membership, makes us legitimate potential winners, we just have to specify our demands and defend them.

Innovations, innovations, innovations! This must be the motto of Bulgaria-U.S. relations. Bearing in mind innovations most often go through defense.

**The title is chosen by the editor.*

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