

Introductory remarks by Vice-President Dombrovskis at Citizens' Dialogue in Sofia

Добър ден! Радвам се да разговарям с вас. [Hello. I am happy to discuss with you today].

I'm very grateful for this opportunity to have this discussion and also to listen how people in Bulgaria see the European Union and the challenges we face, because it's important to constantly assess how we are doing, what is expected and can be improved, and how we can move forward.

And it is clear that Bulgaria wants to move forward. Its Presidency is steering the EU through now a vital couple of months. It is no coincidence that Bulgaria, your Presidency, stands for three very important "B"s: *бъдеще* [*budeshte = future*], budget and the Balkans, and we have important decisions to take in those areas, including indeed our future budget, the strengthening of the euro area, strengthening our Security Union and deepening our relations with our neighbouring countries, to name just a few.

One issue for Bulgaria is its membership of the euro area. And like the country where I come from, Latvia, we also asked this question after we went through a profound financial and economic crisis. We firmly opted for euro adoption, since we found it to be an anchor of economic and monetary stability. Eventually, we managed to go from crisis to euro accession in five years. Of course, it required engagement at all levels of government and ownership among social partners, among others. We had to overcome a number of fears and myths. We had to put in a lot of effort to ensure that prices are stable and do not rise as a result of euro introduction. And that is perfectly doable.

In fact, in economic terms, there are clear benefits of the euro area: it lowers barriers for businesses, it can reduce interest rates, it brings a positive impact on growth as a result of full integration into the single market, and stronger growth eventually leads to higher living standards in the country.

Politically too, euro membership puts countries at the very core of the European Union. So also through joining euro, Bulgaria will gain additional political influence.

As for the preparedness of Bulgaria, I would say the preconditions are there: since the inception of our single currency, the exchange-rate of the lev has been pegged to the euro; you can choose to have your bank savings in euro. So in many ways you are already with one foot in the euro area.

And the Commission is here to support you to get you with a second foot in the euro area as well. President Juncker has made it very clear: the EU wants

to support countries in their efforts to join the euro area. We stand with Bulgaria with this and we are ready to help you get ready for this. One issue is political support. But we also offer a new 'convergence facility' or, in other words, technical and financial assistance to make the adjustments needed. So there we can help countries to prepare and then prosper once inside Eurozone.

On the assessment of Bulgaria's readiness and we will publish our convergence report on 23rd of May. We see much strength in Bulgaria to have robust economic growth, way above EU average and solid fiscal policy, a balanced budget, one of the lowest public debt levels in the EU at 26% of GDP and going down, but of course there is still further work needed. For example, joining the euro also implies becoming part of the Banking Union, and in that sense there is further work in strengthening banking sector.

So to once again come back to my experience in joining the euro in Latvia, I can say that this road to the euro is maybe long and sometimes difficult. Sometimes it can be rocky. But it is a meaningful journey to make, because it mobilises minds and energy in the country to change it for the better and eventually to improve living standards of Bulgarians.

Thank you very much.

Press release: UK gifts historic shipwrecks to Canada

Ownership of the two shipwrecks, HMS Erebus and HMS Terror, two of the most archaeologically important shipwrecks in the world, was formally transferred to the Canadian government with the signing of a Deed of Gift at a ceremony today. With this historic transfer, Inuit of Nunavut, who played a key role in their discovery, will also become joint owners of the wrecks and artefacts.

The ceremony at the Canadian Museum of History saw the Canadian Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Catherine McKenna, accept ownership of the wrecks on behalf of Canada from the UK government, represented by the British High Commissioner Susan le Jeune d'Allegeershecque CMG. Mr Torsten Diesel, from the Inuit Heritage Trust spoke of the importance of this transfer to Inuit.

The gifting is an historic milestone in the long-standing cooperation between the UK and Canada on the issue.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

We have deep historic links with Canada and this gift is testament to our prospering relationship.

The story behind these vessels is both fascinating and incredibly important to the history of both our nations. The UK joined forces with the Canadian government and Inuit population to search for these ships for 172 years and I'm delighted they will now be protected for future generations.

The two ships, under the command of Rear-Admiral Sir John Franklin, set sail from England in 1845 on an ill-fated voyage through the Canadian Arctic to find the Northwest Passage. During the treacherous journey, the ships became trapped in thick sea ice. The crews abandoned the ships to trek overland to safety, but tragically none survived.

Despite many attempts to locate the wrecks, they proved elusive for over 172 years. In 1997, the UK and Canadian governments signed an agreement giving custody and control of the wrecks and their contents to Canada, while still remaining property of the UK.

Thanks to Inuit knowledge of the area, along with state of the art technology, Erebus was finally located in 2014 and Terror two years later in 2016 in shallow Arctic Waters.

In recognition of this momentous discovery, the British and Canadian governments jointly settled a new agreement. As of 26 April 2018, ownership of the vessels has been formally transferred to the government of Canada, and by extension, the Inuit Heritage Trust.

Artefacts from the wrecks will be available for display at museums in both countries. Currently there are examples on display at the Canadian Museum of History as part of the "Death in the Ice" exhibit.

Canadian Minister of Environment and Climate Change Catherine McKenna said:

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the United Kingdom for this exceptional gift of the wrecks of HMS Erebus and HMS Terror and all yet-to-be discovered artifacts. Moving forward, we will work with the Inuit Heritage Trust to ensure these historic treasures are protected, and that the intriguing and expanding story of the Franklin Expedition continues to be shared with Canada and the world.

Pressemitteilung: Neue Kostenoptionen im Bereich Entwicklung des ländlichen Raums sind besser, sollten aber in den Mitgliedstaaten breitere Anwendung finden, so das Fazit der EU-Prüfer

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Press release: New cost options for rural development better, but should be more widely used by Member States, say EU Auditors

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Press release: Boat patrols target illegal fishing

Environment Agency Fisheries Enforcement Officers in the North East are continuing their crackdown on illegal angling.

This week they carried out boat patrols on the River Tees on the lookout for people fishing illegally. On Wednesday they reported two men for fishing for pike during the coarse fishing close season near Preston Park.

The close season prevents fishing for coarse fish for 3 months to give the fish a chance to breed. It runs from 15 March to 15 June inclusive.

Kevin Summerson, Fisheries Enforcement Technical Specialist with the Environment Agency in the North East, said:

The Environment Agency's role is to protect fish stocks and improve fisheries. This includes rescuing fish in distress, improving habitat and restocking rivers across the region which have been

affected by pollution or poor fish passage.

However, the close season means fish are left alone during the spring to allow them the opportunity to breed. During this time our specialist enforcement teams police illegal fishing as they do all year round to ensure compliance with the law.

Licences checked

Enforcement officers have checked around 500 anglers since the beginning of April so far, with most being fully licensed and compliant. Enforcement officers have reported 15 people for offences.

During March the Environment Agency prosecuted nine anglers at courts in the North East for unlicensed fishing and associated offences, resulting in fines and costs totalling almost £2,000. Kevin added:

We take all kinds of illegal fishing very seriously, whether it's those fishing without a licence or licensed anglers using illegal equipment.

It's not fair on other anglers who make sure they fish within the law, and also endangers the future of the sport by damaging the sustainability of fish stocks. It's really important people report information about suspected illegal fishing to us so we can investigate.

The Environment Agency's work is intelligence-led and they work closely with partners to target known hot spots and where illegal fishing is reported. It urges anyone to report illegal fishing by calling 0800 80 70 60.

Coarse fishing is still allowed on most still waters and canals, depending on fishery owner agreement, though a valid fishing licence is still required. You can check which still waters and canals still have a close season in operation by [checking the byelaws which apply in your area online](#)

Anyone who wants to go fishing needs to buy a fishing licence. A full annual licence costs from just £30 (short term and some concessionary licences are also available) and are [available online](#)