

Commission reports on progress in Bulgaria under the Co-operation and Verification Mechanism

Today's report looks concretely at the progress made to meet the 17 recommendations issued by the Commission in its January 2017 CVM Report.

First Vice-President Frans Timmermans said: *"We have seen progress in many areas but there is still more work needed. Bulgaria has met or made progress on several of our recommendations, but not yet all. I count on the Bulgarian Government to implement all the planned reforms, and to avoid backtracking, so that we can move towards the goal of ending the CVM under this Commission's mandate."*

The Commission's last report in January 2017 took stock of overall progress in the past ten years and identified 17 specific recommendations which would help Bulgaria move towards fulfilment of all CVM benchmarks. Today's report notes that significant progress has been achieved on these recommendations. While political uncertainty led to some delays in the implementation of reforms early in the year, the reform process has regained momentum since May, even if final outcomes are still to be seen in areas requiring legislative reform and government action, such as the fight against corruption. In the judiciary, important developments have also taken place this year, notably with the election of a new Supreme Judicial Council, the impact of which should begin to show in the coming year.

While the Commission cannot yet conclude that any of the benchmarks are satisfactorily fulfilled, it remains of the opinion that, with a continued political steer and a determination to advance the reform, Bulgaria should be able to fulfil the outstanding recommendations, and therefore satisfactorily meet the CVM benchmarks, in the near future. The Commission will assess progress again towards the end of 2018.

Background

On 1 January 2007, the Commission established the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism to assess progress against the commitments made by Bulgaria in the areas of judicial reform and the fight against corruption and organised crime. The Commission reports on progress in these areas on a regular basis. The Commission issued its first report on 27 June 2007. The reports have benefitted from contacts with Member States, civil society, international organisations, independent experts and a variety of other sources. The Commission's conclusions and the methodology of the CVM have consistently enjoyed the strong support of the Council of Ministers.

The previous CVM report of January 2017 took stock of 10 years of the CVM, with an overview of the achievements and the remaining challenges, and set out the key remaining steps needed to achieve the CVM's objectives. The

Commission made 17 recommendations that, if met, could be considered as sufficient to close the CVM, unless other developments were to clearly reverse the course of progress. The January report also highlighted that the speed of the process would depend on how quickly Bulgaria will be able to fulfil the recommendations in an irreversible way.

Today's report concerns the period since January 2017. It contains the Commission's assessment on how the Bulgarian authorities have followed-up on the 17 recommendations, and is complemented by a staff working document which sets out the Commission's detailed analysis, drawing on continuous dialogue between the Bulgarian authorities and the Commission services.

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