

JOINT PRESS STATEMENT

THE UNITED STATES AND BULGARIA: ALLIES, PARTNERS, FRIENDS

On May 7, 2016, in Sofia, Bulgaria, Foreign Minister Daniel Mitov and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken reaffirmed Bulgaria and the United States' strong commitment to the bilateral partnership and friendship that have been key to enhancing the security, prosperity, and close ties enjoyed by the Bulgarian and American people over the past 25 years. In the face of today's regional and global challenges, Foreign Minister Mitov and Deputy Secretary Blinken underscored our countries' determination to pursue and realize our shared vision of a Europe, whole, free, and at peace.

Foreign Minister Mitov and Deputy Secretary Blinken welcomed progress of the five high-level U.S.-Bulgaria working groups. Launched in 2015 by Foreign Minister Daniel Mitov and Secretary of State John Kerry, the working groups' mission is to deepen and strengthen the bilateral strategic partnership in these key areas: security and defense, counterterrorism, energy security, the rule of law, and education and people-to-people ties. Foreign Minister Mitov and Deputy Secretary Blinken also charted an ambitious course for future bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

Security and Defense

Security cooperation has been the cornerstone of the U.S.-Bulgarian partnership, and the working group has become a key mechanism for coordinating joint activities and advancing our shared goals, including in these priority areas:

- **Joint Exercises:** Through the European Reassurance Initiative and Operation Atlantic Resolve, U.S.-Bulgarian bilateral military activity over the past years has increased more than 400 percent. Our security cooperation focuses on activities and training that increase joint capacity and interoperability. These activities have included multi-country exercises on land, at sea, and in the air.
- **Leadership and Command Capacity:** The United States supports Bulgaria's efforts with \$7 million per year in military equipment and educational military exchanges.
- **Modernization and Infrastructure Development:** The United States has supported Bulgaria's efforts to modernize its armed forces and reduce dependency on legacy systems. The United States has also made significant infrastructure improvements to the joint facilities where we are training together under our Defense Cooperation Agreement. These sovereign Bulgarian facilities have served as an excellent platform for joint training and exercises.

- Acquisition Management: To increase efficiency and transparency in its resource allocation and acquisition management processes, Bulgaria's Ministry of Defense established a Project Management Directorate, which the United States has supported through training.
- Strategic Communications: The United States Embassy and the Defense Ministry regularly meet to share best practices and coordinate messaging on key NATO and bilateral security topics.
- Cyber Security: USEUCOM has consulted with the Defense Ministry on the development of the Military Cyber Incident Response Center (MCIRT).

In the months ahead, the Working Group will coordinate additional project management training, offer procurement options for further modernization, codify recurring strategic communication engagement, support the establishment of a separate special operations function within the Defense Ministry, and provide training and potential funding for the MCIRT.

Counterterrorism

The Counterterrorism Working Group builds on the already excellent cooperation between the United States and Bulgaria, including through the ongoing exchange of information, training, and joint operations. The Group's objective is to keep our countries and peoples safe through a focused series of cooperative actions:

- Assessment: The Working Group conducted a thorough review and assessment of Bulgaria's capabilities in all aspects of the fight against terrorism, including detection, deterrence, investigation, incident response and prosecution.
- International Cooperation: Bulgaria and the United States are members of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. Bulgaria has contributed to the Coalition's work, including efforts to stop the flow of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs). U.S.-provided training for border police and fraudulent document experts has boosted Bulgaria's capacity to screen and detect FTFs. We plan further U.S.-Bulgarian information sharing to enhance screening, detection of potential threats, and capacity of judicial authorities implementing new counter-FTF legislation.
- Increasing prevention and protection capacity: Bulgaria and the United States have strengthened our ability to coordinate activities through support for Bulgaria's National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) and the National Passenger Information Unit (PIU). The Working Group agreed that the new interagency centers will be the foci of future capacity building efforts, such as

the training and assessment mission conducted by representatives of the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center or the PIU analytical software training.

- Response preparedness: Over the past three years the United States has provided equipment and training to various units of the Bulgarian Army and the Specialized Counterterrorism Unit of the Ministry of Interior. The effect on Bulgaria's national response capabilities has already been significant, while future areas for training and capacity building have been identified. The Working Group also planned and supported a large-scale, multi-scenario counterterrorism training exercise, during which U.S. and Bulgarian units trained together to ensure a coordinated response to possible terror attack scenarios.

The Counterterrorism Working Group has identified future priorities for cooperation, including 1) development of strategic planning documents; 2) improving information exchange and coordination among Bulgarian agencies in response to active threats; 3) enhancing Bulgaria's access to additional screening tools for persons of interest traveling across Bulgaria's borders; and 4) specialized training on techniques for interviewing terrorist subjects and terrorists' use of the Internet and social media. The training courses will target trainers in Bulgarian law enforcement agencies to improve the sustainability of these joint efforts.

Rule of Law

The Rule of Law Working Group has supported Bulgaria's efforts to combat corruption and enhance the effectiveness of its justice sector institutions. The Group's priorities have included:

- Open Government Partnership (OGP): In 2015, the Council of Ministers approved additions to Bulgaria's OGP action plan on preventing conflicts of interest in state institutions.
- Juvenile Justice Reform: The Working Group organized a visit by an American expert on juvenile justice who shared the U.S. experience in this area and continues to work with the Ministry of Justice as it develops draft legislation.
- Transparency and Anti-Corruption: Several international experts visited Bulgaria to share other countries' knowledge regarding conflict of interest practices, integrating anti-corruption efforts across multiple government agencies, as well as sentencing in corruption and organized crime cases.

Future goals for the Rule of Law Working Group include bolstering the Bulgarian government's conflict of interest prevention capacity; implementing e-procurement initiatives; Bulgaria's OGP commitment on business ownership transparency; and,

the introduction of problem-solving courts, with a focus on handling juvenile justice issues.

Energy Security

The Energy Security Working Group was established to address Bulgaria's energy sector vulnerabilities that stem from over-dependence on single suppliers. Its initial goals were: diversification of gas routes and supplies; diversification of nuclear fuel supply; safe storage of nuclear fuel; and, training of Bulgarian experts on energy planning.

During the past year, the United States has supported Bulgaria's important steps to diversify its gas routes: 1) the December 2015 signing of a Final Investment Decision for the Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria (IGB) pipeline; 2) the April 2016 signing of a contract for the completion of the Interconnector Bulgaria-Romania (IBR); and, 3) the modernization of the Ihtiman, Lozenets, and Strandja Gas Compressor Stations. In the nuclear sector, the United States brought technical experts to Bulgaria to inform the Government of Bulgaria, Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant (KNPP), and other stakeholders about: 1) the demonstrated technological feasibility of using an alternative fuel supply in KNPP's VVER-1000 reactors; and 2) the cost-effective option of using dry cask storage to store spent nuclear fuel on-site.

In the coming year, the Working Group will focus on advancing these key projects: 1) construction of the IGB pipeline; 2) advancing the Chiren UGS-Expansion project; 3) developing and executing an action plan for alternative nuclear fuel supply licensing prior to KNPP's next nuclear fuel supply tender; and, 4) initiating a feasibility study of dry cask storage for Spent Nuclear Fuel for KNPP's Units 5 and 6. By undertaking these energy diversification projects, Bulgaria could, for example, increase its access to alternative supplies of gas through the IGB and take the first step in building and connecting infrastructure throughout the region that could change energy markets here for decades to come.

Education and People-to-People Ties

The Working Group on Education and Exchange coordinates a wide range of programs and initiatives to further develop Bulgaria's professionals and to provide youth with the skills that they will need to build Bulgaria's future. The Working Group has advanced our bilateral cooperation in these key areas:

- **Fulbright Program:** This premier academic program brings American scholars and professionals to Bulgaria and Bulgarian scholars and professionals to the United States to allow them to share perspectives and experience. Through assistance from both the U.S. government and the America for Bulgaria Foundation, over 1,100 Bulgarians and Americans have participated in the Fulbright program, advancing graduate and post-graduate-level collaboration and research in science, technology, language, math, business, journalism, and cultural arts. Currently, nine U.S. academics and researchers are conducting research and teaching in Bulgaria's universities, 30 English-language teachers from the United States are assigned to high schools and universities throughout Bulgaria, and 16 Bulgarian scholars and researchers are teaching and conducting research in the United States.
- **Summer Work and Travel Program:** The United States will soon issue the 100,000th visa under this popular program. To ensure that participants benefit for a lifetime, the U.S. Embassy launched in 2015 a Summer Work and Travel Alumni Association, which provides networking opportunities and helps support program alumni in their endeavors.
- **Bilateral Commission on Cultural Preservation:** The United States and Bulgaria established the Commission in order to increase the frequency of cultural exchanges programs that focus on sharing best practices and building capacity. The United States is dedicated to continuing its long-standing contributions to Bulgaria's unique and diverse cultural heritage. Under the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation, the Embassy is implementing an almost \$700,000 project to preserve the 14th-century Saint John Aliturgetos church in Nesebar. Other cultural preservation projects include the conservation of two 4th-century Christian tombs in central Sofia; the preservation of the 4th-century BC Thracian Tomb of Kran II in the Valley of the Thracian Kings; the restoration of the 17th-century Kurshum Mosque in Silistra; the preservation of 3rd-century mosaic floors in ancient Philippopolis (modern-day Plovdiv); and the preservation of the early-19th--century library and the Pazvantoglu Mosque in Vidin.
- **Cyclotron Particle Accelerator:** Bulgaria's Institute for Nuclear Research and Nuclear Energy (INRNE) and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) have partnered to bring a state-of-the-art TR-24 cyclotron to Bulgaria to save lives, save money, and advance scientific research in Bulgaria. Once operational, the cyclotron will produce all the medical isotopes needed by Bulgarian cancer patients rather than facing a grave shortage because of the high cost of imported medical isotopes. The cyclotron will also advance science as INRNE and international partners use it to cutting-edge scientific experiments. The cyclotron was purchased with a \$3 million contribution from DOE and a \$2

million contribution from the Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant and delivered to Bulgaria in January 2016. The machine is in storage pending the Government of Bulgaria allocating funding to build the facility that will house and operate the cyclotron.

The Education and People-to-People Working Group is developing a strategy to increase collaboration with the Bulgarian scientific diaspora in the United States and other countries. Plans include increased promotion of the Fulbright program among the scientific community in Bulgaria and the establishment of an organization that will facilitate international scientific collaboration. The Bilateral Commission on Cultural Preservation is planning a cultural tourism conference in November 2016 to explore contemporary strategies for presenting Bulgaria's rich cultural heritage to domestic and foreign tourists. The Working Group will also expedite the construction of a facility that will house the jointly funded cyclotron.

Sofia, 7 May 2016