

*Nickolay E. MLADENOV
Foreign Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria
Address to the American Jewish Committee Global Forum
Washington DC, 28 April 2011*

[OPENING]

Dear President Martinelli,
Dear AJC President Elman,
Dear Minister de Maiziere,
Dear David,
Dear friends from the Bulgarian Jewish community,

Before I start, let me add my voice to those who have called for us to remember the victims of natural disasters in the United States over the last few days.

Let me also call on all of us to remember the victims of manmade disasters in the Middle East. Those people who are currently in the streets of Misrata, on the squares of Sana'a, in Syria -- standing up for their freedom peacefully and demanding that their vision of a free Middle East -- a Middle East in which human rights are observed -- be met.

David spoke briefly about the friendship between Bulgaria and the American Jewish Committee.

The friendship between Bulgaria and the American Jewish Committee has stood the test of time, much like the friendship of the Bulgarian people and the people of the United States of America.

To many of us the last twenty years were about bringing our country back to the community of values from which it was brutally separated by World War II, by the Nazis and then by Communism.

In 1989, when the Berlin Wall fell we looked to the United States as a beacon of democracy; we looked to the Jewish people, whose struggle for a homeland resembles much of our own history and whose ambitions for peace and recognition have been shared by countless Bulgarians throughout generations.

Our agenda was ambitious and bold -- to transform our country into a democratic state; to revive and strengthen our traditions of tolerance and respect for all faiths; and to bring our country into NATO and the European Union. Our friends in the United States and Israel have stood with us every step of the way.

Nickolay E. MLADENOV
Foreign Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria
Address to the American Jewish Committee Global Forum
Washington DC, 28 April 2011

In August of last year my good friend David Harris was awarded the Order of the Madara Horseman -- one of our nation's highest decorations, for his invaluable contribution to the development of the Bulgarian - US relations.

Dear David,

Allow me today to **extend that recognition to every single one of you here**, to all members and friends of the American Jewish Committee and say thank you for consistently promoting the friendship between our nations and helping forge a strong alliance between Bulgaria and the United States,

Thank you for your unfailing support for reforms, and for promoting Bulgaria's membership in the **NATO**;

Thank you for being there in **times of need**, including the time when AJC took a firm stand in advocating the release of the Bulgarian medics wrongly accused and sentenced to death by the Gaddafi regime in Libya;

Thank you for partnering with the **Bulgarian Jewish Community** "Shalom" in standing up to anti-Semitism; remembering the Holocaust; countering the influence of Islamist extremism and other movements hostile to our shared security.

Yashar Kochachem!

Dear friends,

Just a few days ago, Pesach was celebrated. At the Seder night you read in the Haggada: "in every generation a person is obligated to see himself as if he or she himself has come out of Egypt."

Mitzrayim, the Hebrew word for "Egypt," can also be read as *Meitzarim* meaning "boundaries" and "constrictions"; *yetziat mitzrayim*, "going out of Egypt," is the endeavor to rise above all that inhibits us.

Our greatest challenge today is overcoming the *meitzrayim* that we have created ourselves and standing resolute for what is good, what is right, and what is righteous.

Tonight I would like to address **three sets of questions** -- the threat of rising xenophobia and anti-Semitism, particularly in Europe; peace between the State of Israel and the Palestinian people; and the wave of change that is sweeping across the Middle East and North Africa.

Nickolay E. MLADENOV
Foreign Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria
Address to the American Jewish Committee Global Forum
Washington DC, 28 April 2011

The choices that we make today on how we address these challenges will prove whether we have been able to collectively -- as a global community of democracies -- successfully complete our *yetziat mitzrayim*.

A recent report concluded that about half of all Europeans believe that there are **too many immigrants** in their countries, a significant number of people think that **Jews seek to benefit** from their forbearers' suffering during the Nazi era; and half or more of respondents **condemn Islam** as "a religion of intolerance". The report concluded that anti-Semitism and other forms of xenophobia are very closely linked. That those with anti-Semitic tendencies are likely to be xenophobic against other minority groups, including Muslims, as well as resentful of homosexuals and women.

Is it true that we can do nothing about these things? Should we accept them, should we accept the anti-Semitism and xenophobia as the boundaries -- the *meitzrayim* -- of today's reality? Or should we challenge them, stand up and defend our own values?

Here are a few suggestions of what I think we should do challenge this threat.

First, we should **never ever forget the crime of the Holocaust** – as Yom Hashoa that will be internationally commemorated this coming Sunday

In human history to this day this remains perhaps the darkest hour. Keeping the memory of the Shoah alive serves the memories of the countless human beings who perished in the death camps, but also keeps us vigilant about the dangers of genocide around the world.

While remembering the Shoah, we should not shy away from showing the world the crimes against humanity committed by the **Soviet Stalinist regime**. Those crimes are an intricate part of the history of the Holocaust.

I come from a country that is in a turbulent part of the world, yet has managed to prove that people of different religions – Christians, Muslims and Jews; of different ethnic backgrounds – Bulgarians, Turks and Armenians can actually live together. Bulgaria has seen **stellar moments** in its history, for example when civil society rose during the Second World War and refused to allow its Jewish population to be sent to concentration camps saving the lives of about 50,000 human beings; or when, after the end of Communism, we peacefully reintegrated our Turkish minority back into our own country.

But it has also seen its **dark moments** – when it failed to save the Jewish populations of occupied Northern Greece and Vardar Macedonia who were deported to the death camps; or when the Communist regime expelled a large part of our Muslim citizens not because of anything they did, but because of who they were.

Nickolay E. MLADENOV
Foreign Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria
Address to the American Jewish Committee Global Forum
Washington DC, 28 April 2011

Our history teaches us that nations are strong when their civic spirit is strong. It teaches us that you must find pride not only in great historic battles and ancient legends, but in great feats of civic activism, in the standing up for your values and protecting your neighbors. The Jews of Bulgaria survived World War II because hundreds of religious and community leaders, politicians, ordinary men and women stood up and refused to be part of Hitler's madness.

Imagine the courage and conviction it took to stand up to Nazi policies in a country that was allied with the Third Reich!

As a young Bulgarian I stand tall and proud of the spirit of my predecessors. Their example actually inspires me much more than the Medieval stories of greatness and empires that we have so many of in Europe.

As a human being I cannot but feel shameful that this civic spirit -- so strong in Bulgaria during the times of the Shoah -- was not present in the occupied territories, where at least 11,000 Jews perished. Their memory lives on and they shall never be forgotten.

It is because of this inspiring, yet tragic history that we in Bulgaria are very sensitive to any attempt to deny anyone their right of existence or of a homeland. This is why we are very sensitive to any attempt to deny the Jewish people the right of a homeland and a state.

I can accept criticism of the policies of any government, but I cannot stand idle when the right of existence is denied to anyone.

To dismiss such policies in passing, would mean to fail at our collective *yetziat mitzrayim*, because **the success of our civilization will be measured by our ability to protect and promote the values of democracy, freedom and tolerance, not just by the number of iPads we produce.**

My country today is the product of the traditions of Christians, Jews and Muslims. One's ethnic background, one's religious beliefs do not matter -- we are all a part of the Bulgarian nation. This is our richness, this makes us unique in the Balkans. Our diversity and sensitivity to all issues of identity beacons us to stand up and say clearly tonight three things:

- **we shall never accept the policies of Iran** to develop nuclear weapons, to challenge the right of a member state of the United Nations to exist, to brutally oppress all opposition;

- **we will stand up to those who aim to subvert the Durban process**; Bulgaria will continue to be part of the preparation for the forthcoming Durban III conference, but will reconsider its participation in the process if it fails to meet its original lofty goals and

*Nickolay E. MLADENOV
Foreign Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria
Address to the American Jewish Committee Global Forum
Washington DC, 28 April 2011*

continues to unfoundedly single out the state of Israel. This is why in December 2010 we voted against the Durban Follow-up UN General Assembly Resolution;

• **we will say “no” to all who aim to de-legitimize Israel**; The vilification and demonizing of Israel is not only a denial of its right of existence as a home for the Jewish people but a blunt assault on the very values of democracy, freedom and independent human spirit.

To refuse the right of Israel to exist means to refuse the right of the Palestinian people to also have a state of their own.

Which brings me to my second theme.

The Jewish people have the right to have a homeland in the State of Israel. The Palestinian people also have the right to a state of their own. Both have the obligation to live side by side in peace and prosperity. Both are destined to live together and in peace with their neighbors -- Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the rest of the Arab World.

Bulgaria is a country that boasts a strategic partnership with the State of Israel, but also has strong links with the Palestinian people.

Today, the leaders of Israel and the leaders of the Palestinian people face a historic challenge -- to build a partnership that leads to a two-state solution and jointly work towards contributing to peace in the broader Middle East.

To be true partners, both sides need to take difficult decisions.

On the Palestinian side it means reasserting the full control of the PA -- as a representative of the Palestinian people -- over both the West Bank and Gaza; achieving reconciliation of all factions under one secular authority that recognizes all previous commitments and recommits not to use force or to allow terror to achieve its goals. Last but not least, it also means not to look for a unilateral solution but pursue the path of negotiations.

On the side of Israel it means holding back on policies that may be perceived to predetermine a final settlement; allowing more economic opportunity and activity in the West Bank in order to create the institutions of a future Palestinian state; and last but not least allowing for the economic opening of Gaza, while protecting the security of Israel.

In paving the way for peace we must recognize the legitimate concerns of both sides – **Israel's security** and the need for a **viable Palestinian state**.

Nickolay E. MLADENOV
Foreign Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria
Address to the American Jewish Committee Global Forum
Washington DC, 28 April 2011

In this effort we cannot and must not forget the 1.5 million people who live in **Gaza** – they have the right to a better life. Just like the children of **Sderot who** have the right to go to school without the threat or rocket attacks.

It is the duty of all friends of peace to see that Israelis and Palestinians together overcome the boundaries, the constraints, the *mietzrayim* to peace. This is why Bulgaria will stand in support of all efforts to achieve reconciliation and to advance solutions based on negotiations, not violence or unilateral acts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we stand on the doorstep of historic **change in the Middle East**. Change, the scale of which can be only compared to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the sweeping transformation of Central and Eastern Europe after the end of Communism.

Both processes are quite different, but share a fundamental similarity -- people have come out of the bondage of fear. Although the circumstances in each country are divergent, the root causes for what is happening in the Middle East are similar.

- **Corrupt leadership** breeds dissent and with no democratic process in place, this dissent pours out onto the streets.
- **Young people** want to be engaged in the future of their countries, not forced into a world of virtual reality and frowned upon by aging dictators.
- Millions of people who live on the brink of poverty and see a privileged few reap the benefits of economic freedom will demand **fair economic opportunities** for all.

Add to that the feeling of revival, the demand of millions of young Arabs to be respected not to be denied the opportunities that others have, not to be talked down or discriminated and you have the makings of a **revolution of Arab dignity and self respect**, a historic revolution indeed.

As change sweeps across North Africa and the Middle East we in Europe and the United States need to look beyond tomorrow. In 1989 the United States and Western Europe at that point extended a hand to all of us coming out from Communist dictatorships by offering the prospect of EU and NATO membership.

Today, we need to match the scale of that historic effort of 20 years ago with a new partnership for security and prosperity with the Middle East and North Africa.

- The **EU** should extend opportunities for economic cooperation and market access;
- **NATO** should stand ready to promote a new Mediterranean security partnership;

Nickolay E. MLADENOV
Foreign Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria
Address to the American Jewish Committee Global Forum
Washington DC, 28 April 2011

- The **Council of Europe** should offer association to all North African and Middle Eastern countries that want to protect human rights and enshrine in their constitutions the freedoms that we hold dear;
- **Central and Eastern Europe** should offer the lessons learned from our transition to our Southern neighbors;
- But most importantly perhaps, the US and the EU should always remember that it is our **transatlantic bond** that makes us strong and that bond should continue to be the cornerstone for all our policies in the Middle East.

These are some of the reasons why on May 5th and 6th, the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry is convening the first of a series of international conferences to look at how we can support transition in the Middle East, while advancing the secular nature of government and protecting our security.

Before I conclude, I cannot but turn to the situation in Syria.

Ten days ago I visited President Assad in Damascus and spoke with him at length. And I carried a strong message that had two elements. First, break the cycle of violence, pull back the tanks. Second, open up a rapid, radical programme of reforms for Syria.

To this message I can only now add two things – don't harbor enemies of peace and extend a hand of agreement with your neighbors. Difficult choices are needed. But historic choices that are fundamental to the security of the Middle East, to the security of Europe and ultimately to the security of the United States.

I hope you will join me today and many others across Europe who want to call on the leadership of Syria to be loyal not to anyone else but to its own people and to initiate radical, massive, unprecedented reforms that will open up that country and provide for its return into the family of all modern nations. I think this is perhaps the most important message that this week we can all carry to our friends in the Middle East if we really not just crave but work for peace.

Dear David, dear friends,

I started by quoting the *Mishna*. "In every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as if he or she himself has come out of Egypt." *Pesah* is the festival of eternal freedom, it shows that salvation is possible indeed, that we must do good, that it's not just about remembering but reliving, overcoming and **educating**.

The values that are enshrined in the *Pesah* carry a universal message across religions and cultures.

*Nickolay E. MLADENOV
Foreign Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria
Address to the American Jewish Committee Global Forum
Washington DC, 28 April 2011*

A message that is shared by Christians on Easter, a message with which all who have lived in oppression can identify with. And I hope we take that message together to all those who continue to live under oppression.

Thank you.

[CLOSING]