



Center for Strategic & International Studies
Washington, DC

Bulgarian official discusses the fight against organized crime, corruption

On February 17, CSIS hosted Bulgaria's Interior Minister Rumen Petkov. Petkov emphasized Bulgaria's positive role in the Balkans and the country's willingness to assist in the peace-keeping and reconstruction missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. According to him, Bulgaria can be a source of stability for the region, which can be demonstrated by the ethnic and religious tolerance evident in the country. There has been significant progress in Bulgaria's cooperation with the Euro-Atlantic structures, specifically in law enforcement to combat organized crime and international terrorism. Cooperation with Turkey and Romania is also imperative to eliminate border trafficking.

Petkov noted that Bulgaria's economic, political, and ethnic stability is important for the region. In order to fight efficiently against organized crime groups the Bulgarian government is committed to promoting high-level cooperation between interior ministers throughout the region: Bulgaria will host a conference of interior ministers on 18 March 2006.

Bulgaria is a transit location for counterfeit currency, drugs, and human trafficking. However, some signs of progress can be seen in the decline in the crime rate during recent years, with a five percent drop registered last year. Petkov asserted that progress has been considerable. During the period between August 2005 and January 2006, the Ministry of Interior launched several successful actions against organized criminal networks. He also placed stress on the fulfillment of recommendations contained in the EU *Aquis* chapter dealing with "Justice and Internal Affairs" and the ongoing fight against official corruption. A key element in resolving the menace of organized crime and corruption is to raise the effectiveness of law enforcement bodies.

The minister added that further progress is also needed in the judicial system to meet the required EU standards. When Bulgaria accedes in 2007, it will become the outer boundary for the European Union.

Bulgaria's cooperation with the CIA and other U.S. law enforcement agencies has also been substantial for the ongoing battle to curb illegal trafficking. Petkov commented that there is always the likelihood that funds from organized crime can be transferred to radical groups, possibly even Islamic militants.

Regarding the partnership with the U.S., Bulgaria has been in the same mindset when it comes to international issues such as Iran or the country's contribution and participation in peacekeeping mission alongside U.S. and NATO allies in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Kosovo. The two countries need each other as partners. Nevertheless, the principles of

this partnership must be better clarified in the future. Bulgaria wants to achieve an effective partnership in the fields of security and economy and with the shift of U.S. strategic interests to the East; Bulgarian bases will be used as staging areas for troops.

The goal of Minister Petkov's visit to Washington was to strengthen ties between Bulgaria and the United States as equal, enduring, and strategic partners. The task ahead is to carry out joint analyses and risk assessments in order to guarantee positive outcomes.