
Introduction

For nearly two decades, the Center for the Study of Democracy has been at the forefront of civil society's efforts to strengthen democratic institutions and the rule of law in Bulgaria, not only offering analysis of various problematic areas of governance but also coming up with innovative proposals for successful wide-ranging reforms. The past year has unequivocally demonstrated the urgent need for similarly profound institutional changes to be implemented in the field of Justice and Home Affairs. Clearly – to observers both inside the country and abroad – Bulgaria's political system has been plagued by two structural deficits: namely, the deficit of political will and the lack of administrative capacity to undertake long-overdue anticorruption reforms. Nevertheless, as in previous years, CSD did not remain merely a passive observer of events.

CSD has indeed actively worked to encourage efforts to overcome these two structural deficits. The Center considers it its mission to both analyze current social practices and promote solutions to the most acute problems the country is facing; indeed, in some cases it has even actively been involved in the implementation of such solutions. Perhaps it is for this reason that during the international conference entitled "Democracy That Delivers: Realizing the Full Potential of the Transition", US Ambassador to Bulgaria John Byerle referred to the Center as a "think-tank with teeth". A case in point was the Center's widely publicised and successful contribution to putting an end to duty-free trade along Bulgaria's land borders: traditionally a breeding ground for organized criminal activity aided and abetted by institutionalized political corruption.

Throughout 2008, the Center focused on the following high-priority tasks:

- Enhancing the capacity of the legal system and law-enforcement authorities in counteracting corruption and crime;
- Monitoring racism and xenophobia in Bulgaria and the progress made in curbing them, as part of initiatives undertaken by the Center in its capacity as national coordinator for the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency;
- Developing policies for curbing the hidden economy in Bulgaria; assessing corruption risks in public procurement and the management of state properties;
- Supporting crime prevention through the analysis of key crime generating factors by types of criminal activity and the social groups involved; encouraging dialogue among all relevant institutions;
- Cooperating with government and non-governmental institutions in Bulgaria and its partners from the EU, NATO, and Southeast Europe, with the aim of encouraging dialogue on the subjects of energy security and energy independence.

Public-private partnership remains the Center's preferred method of achieving social impact at both the national and international levels. It is indeed only by means of public-private partnership between leading members of civil society, reform-minded politicians, and the country's international partners that the above-mentioned structural deficits could possibly be overcome so that institutional reforms to modernize the country may continue.

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