

SERGEI STANISHEV: BULGARIAN GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO RECOGNIZE THE INDEPENDENCE OF KOSOVO IS FULLY COMPLIED WITH THE COUNTRY'S NATIONAL INTERESTS AND OUR COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE OF THE REGION

20 March 2008



Bulgarian Government's decision to recognize the independence of Kosovo is fully complied with the country's national interests and our commitment to the future of the region, told the Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev a news conference, which was held with the participation of Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ivailo Kalfin. At its regular session Thursday the Bulgarian Government decided to recognize the independence of Kosovo, which is under international observation. Diplomatic relations at

embassy level will be established. The Foreign Minister is authorized to notify the official authorities in Kosovo about the decision.

We demanded clear-cut commitments and policy from Kosovo's institutions to adopt relevant legislation, to fully implement the principles and the arrangements envisaged by the Ahtisaari Plan and to prepare and pass a constitution of Kosovo which is to reflect the commitments for the fulfillment of the European standards, reminded the Prime Minister. He expressed Bulgarian Government's satisfaction with the actions of Kosovo's institutions which explicitly illustrate their commitment for the observances of minority rights.

Bulgaria is interested in the provision of maximum guarantees for the peace and stability of the region. The international commitment through KFOR and UNMIK and the EU decision to send a mission are the biggest guarantee against the existing risks, the Prime Minister stated. The worst decision for Bulgaria would have been a frozen conflict without international presence and surveillance since this would mean instability in the region as a whole, added the Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev.

Stanishev also emphasized that Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ivailo Kalfin informed the National Assembly of Bulgaria on regular basis about the country's stand and the development of the situation. Already after Kosovo declared its independence, the EU called an emergency meeting of the foreign ministers, at which Bulgaria declared its position, Prime Minister Stanishev added.

Bulgaria is the 18th country to recognize Kosovo, whose independence is under international observation, said Stanishev and reminded that the US, Britain, France and Germany are among the first countries to do that.

The Bulgarian authorities were very active in the dialogue between Serbia and the Kosovo authorities in the recent years, Stanishev also said. In his view it is quite natural to have a sharp reaction on the part of Serbia in the following days and weeks given that elections are upcoming in this country. As he put it, a political response of the Republic of Serbia is inevitable because the Kosovo issue is highly sensitive for each Serbian citizen.

Bulgaria follows an independent foreign policy and its foreign political decisions are fully complied with the Bulgarian national interests, Kalfin said at the news conference. Bulgaria does not have an intention to withdraw its Ambassador from Belgrade, Kalfin stated. This country will keep on working actively for the promotion of good neighbourly relations and for Serbia's progress along the road to the EU. The Foreign Minister made these statements taking a question on whether a request has been filed for the withdrawal of the Serbian Ambassador from Bulgaria and whether Bulgaria would have to withdraw its Ambassador, if such request is made.

"When speaking about the national interest, we do not have to choose between Kosovo and

Serbia - this is a ridiculous choice - but we choose between the only possibility for the international community to interfere and commit actively to the establishment of a positive political process in the Western Balkans, on the one hand, and, on the other, the creation of a conflict, aggravating into violence," Kalfin stated.

Establishment of diplomatic relations at embassy level is imminent. Since 2003 there is a diplomatic bureau in Pristina and Bulgaria intends to issue visas and open a consulate, said Kalfin.