

Overview of 1998

Bulgaria managed to maintain political and economic stability and consolidate further its reforms despite turmoil in the region in 1998. The crisis limitation measures of 1997 developed into longer term transition policies both domestically and as regards Bulgaria's international engagements. Although not always lacking controversy, key pieces of legislation were introduced by Parliament laying the foundation for sustained institution building in the country.

One of the hallmarks of democratic stability in Bulgaria has been the increased involvement of non-governmental organizations in the policy making process. Thus, for example, one of the undoubtedly high points of our work in 1998 was the formation of *Coalition 2000*. Launched at the Center's initiative, the *Coalition* process exemplifies CSD's "building bridges" policy at its best. The immediate and positive response to our proposal for anti-corruption cooperation from both public and private organizations was the reward of years of persistence in making public-private dialogue a priority of our reform efforts.

Since its establishment, the Center has constantly endeavored to preserve and strengthen its independence as facilitator of a democratic and efficient policy making process. Nearly ten years later, the successful launch of *Coalition 2000* and its international recognition as a model for finding consensus solutions to difficult policy issues in the context of transformation, is the apparent fruit of the Center's commitment to non-partisanship and wide public outreach.

European integration was another important field in which the Center has led the way for a more substantial NGO role in the Bulgarian polity. Long declared as a key foreign policy priority of the country, in 1998 EU accession preparations became a crucial component of domestic reforms. By publishing its pioneering analytical volume *Bulgaria and the European Union: Towards and Institutional Infrastructure* CSD made a contribution to policy formulation and priority setting in legislative harmonization at a time when the government administration was gathering strength, although still lacking the adequate policy analysis and formulation capacity. Through its analytical work, involving both public and private sector experts, combined with efforts to encourage and maintain dialogue CSD contributed to establishing a broad base in society with a stake in the success of the integration process.

The issues that dominated the agenda of our Economic Program in 1998 related to key areas of transition: the role of transparency and integrity of governance in economic development and the modernization of social policies. As regards the latter, the Economic Program adopted an integrated approach addressing privatization and social security reform, development of pension funds and health care reform in parallel.

Bearing in mind that corruption holds back development and discourages investment, in 1998 the Economic Program focused on enhancing the awareness, and encouraging the adoption and practical implementation of democratic values, such as transparency, trust, integrity, in the economy and the policy process. Capital markets was one of the

fields in which these objectives were pursued in particular through drafting of legislation, dissemination and advocacy.

Continuing its focus on the modernization of the legislation on non-profit organizations, the Law Reform Program broadened its efforts in this area with an educational aspect. The development of a comprehensive training course – covering nearly all key legal and managerial issues – for non-profit organizations was started in 1998. The course will become part of Master’s programs at some Bulgarian universities thus further ensuring the sustainability of the non-profit sector in Bulgaria.

A new area of interest for the Program in 1998 was the institution of the ombudsman. Essentially a mediator between the administration and the citizens, the ombudsman is an important element of a stable democracy. Bulgaria has been slow in introducing it, and the Law Reform Program has focused on elaborating the legal basis for its establishment.

Vitosha Research, CSD’s survey research arm, made a substantial contribution to the introduction of independent monitoring of public policy. Its *Corruption Monitoring System*, whose first results were published in 1998, is an innovative survey design measuring institutional change by way of combining quantitative and qualitative studies of the public in general and special social groups (e.g. public officials, businesspersons, etc.). The output is a set of comprehensive and uniquely analytical indexes allowing both government policy makers and independent pressure groups and NGOs to receive indispensable feedback on their anti-corruption efforts.

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