

Positive Marks for Bulgaria in Judicial Reform and Fight Against Corruption



News

Thomas Wahl

On 13 November 2018, the Commission presented a [progress report on Bulgaria under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism \(CVM\)](#). The CVM assessed progress made in Bulgaria's commitments in the areas of judicial reform and the fight against corruption and organised crime since its EU accession in 2007.

The recent November 2018 report focuses on whether Bulgaria made enough progress to meet the recommendations as set out in the Commission's progress report in January 2017. Fulfilment of these recommendations is a pre-requisite for achieving the CVM's objectives as set out in benchmarks and for finally closing the CVM procedure for Bulgaria.

The report notes that Bulgaria is on good track. Several recommendations are considered being implemented and others being very close to implementation. Hence, three of six benchmarks (judicial independence, legislative framework, and organised crime) can be considered provisionally closed.

Notwithstanding, the Commission's report indicates concern over significant deterioration in the Bulgarian media environment recently. This may risk restricting public access to information and have a negative impact on judicial independence, with targeted attacks on judges in some media. The Commission stresses that the media, as well as civil society, must be able to hold those exercising power accountable – free from pressure.

The Commission will closely monitor further progress on Bulgaria's part. It anticipates that the CVM process for Bulgaria can be concluded soon.

The developments in Bulgaria are decoupled from those in Romania, which is also subject to a CVM. In the progress report on Romania, published in parallel, the Commission found a regression of Romania's efforts to meet the CVM requirements.

The CVM applies to Romania and Bulgaria. It was established upon accession of the two countries to the EU in 2007 in order to remedy certain shortcomings that existed in both Member States in the areas of judicial reform and the fight against corruption, and – in the case of Bulgaria – the fight against organised crime. These weaknesses were thought to prevent an effective application of EU laws, policies, and programmes and prevent Bulgarians and Romanians from enjoying their full rights as EU citizens. The Commission regularly verifies progress against specific benchmarks.

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Each Commission report, as well as its methodology and conclusions, is subject to subsequent discussion in the Council of Ministers and has been consistently endorsed in Council Conclusions. The reports and methodology are also presented to the European Parliament.

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