

CONCLUSION

In June 2008 at the New York Stock Exchange Bulgaria's Finance Minister Plamen Oresharski received the World Bank and International Finance Corporation award for **excellent conditions for doing business**⁸² in Bulgaria's emerging market. Almost parallel to that, the European Union urged the country in very insistent terms to **crack down corruption**, including in the management of EU funds and programs. These two landmark events show what Bulgaria has been able to achieve over the past six years and what it has failed in, including the targets and indicators set in the national MDG framework.

Goal 1 is about raising incomes and curbing unemployment. In 2006 average incomes in Bulgaria reached 142 euros against the planned target of 280 euros by 2015. Annual income growth rates over 10% and high inflation give reason to revise the average income target to 337 euros by 2015. Declining relative poverty implies revising that target indicator from 15% to 13% by 2015. The youth unemployment target of 25% was practically overachieved in 2006 (19.5%) and calls for a more ambitious target of 15%. The long-term unemployment target of 7% was also overachieved (5% in 2006) and was redefined to 3% for 2015.

In the coming years, Bulgaria will face unemployment issues more and more rarely as they increasingly give way to shortage of skilled labor. EU membership and the Lisbon Strategy in particular make it necessary to expand the unemployment reduction target with specific additional indicators measuring employment, labor productivity and the relative share of employee compensation in GDP. A realistic goal for Bulgaria would be to achieve 45% of EU labor productivity by 2015. However, poor labor productivity is a result of overall business efficiency in Bulgaria and not only of workforce efficiency. An indication that wages lag behind is that whereas labor productivity is 35% of EU average, earned income is about 20% of EU average.

Regional and ethnic disparities continue to hold back total economic growth. The proportion of the poor at the municipal level varies from 1.8% in the capital Sofia to 53.8% in Boynitsa, Vidin district, and 38 municipalities report unemployment over 25%. Against the backdrop of low incomes, which place Bulgaria at the bottom of EU standards, luxury consumption is growing at a stunning pace and volume.

Economic growth should have a much stronger social focus. A new public consensus is needed based on more solidarity and justice, which are the fundamental democratic values of the European social model.

The second Millennium Development Goal is about education. Indicator dynamics show relatively good achievements in access to education.

Basic education continues to have a high coverage – 94.7% of children graduated elementary school in 2007 against a 100% target by 2015. Issues build up in the upper educational grades. No small numbers of children drop out of school, mostly in the second (junior high) stage of primary education.

International studies show that the quality of education in Bulgaria's elementary schools is still very good, but it falls down in junior high schools. Between 1995 and 2003 Bulgaria lost 51 points in international student performance rankings in mathematics and 66 points in natural sciences – the highest drop in all 46 countries covered by the assessment (TIMSS).

Like economic development, progress in education is uneven geographically and socially. Educational disparities divide not only Roma children and Bulgarian children, rural children and children in Sofia. There is a great divide between elite schools (special profile high schools) and other schools, which were more than 100 points apart in PISA 2006. Formally, all Bulgarian children have equal access to primary and secondary education. In reality, many Bulgarian children have already been excluded from the global running. And a very small part has vast chances to be among the winners.

⁸² 2008 Top Ten Reformers of the Year Award.

To improve quality, Bulgaria needs a streamlined school network; an independent system to evaluate the quality of education; and an effective teacher qualification and career development system, as well as elevating education into a national priority.

The third Millennium Development Goal is about promoting gender equality, more specifically by eradicating income differences between men and women and ensuring wider participation of women in governance.

Women's participation in the labor market grew to 47.5% in 2007 from 43.9% in 2002, but is still far from the 60% Lisbon target by 2010. The number of employed women in Bulgaria is 3 percentage points lower compared to EU-27 and 4 points lower compared to the old EU member states (EU-15). The pay gap is closing faster. In 2001-2005 it dropped from 21.17% to 17.16%, down by 4 percentage points. At end-2005, working women were paid on average 82.84% of the wage of working men against a 80% target by 2015.

Developments under the second target are rather negative. After more than doubling up to 26% in the 38th National Assembly, the number of women parliamentarians edged down to 22% in the 40th National Assembly. As a result, Bulgaria slipped from the 19th position worldwide in March 2003 to 42nd in August 2007.⁸³ By October 2007, only 43 of 240 representatives in the 40th National Assembly were women.

Women are represented even less in the executive and in local governments. In October 2007, only 4 of 18 ministers were women and only 5 of 28 district governors were women. The number of women in office is even smaller at the local level – out of 264 municipal mayors, only 20 were women.

Bulgaria needs to systematically implement gender equality policies in all policies and activities. A particularly important step is the adoption of the Equal Opportunities Bill, which has been postponed since 2001.

Child mortality (Goal 4) is indicative for the overall social and economic state of any society and goes far

beyond issues of healthcare and medical care. From 2001 to 2006 infant (under-one) mortality in Bulgaria significantly decreased from 14.4/1,000 to 9.2/1,000. Under-five mortality also decreased from 16.7/1,000 in 2001 to 11.0/1,000 in 2007. If that annual reduction rate of 5 to 6% is sustained, Bulgaria will be able to achieve its planned targets by 2015. Progress against the other two targets is significantly slower. Perinatal mortality has declined marginally from 12.3/1,000 in 2001 to 11.0/1,000 in 2007, whereas underweight births show no substantial dynamics over the past 6 years (8.8% in 2007 compared with 8.6% in 2001).

Positive changes result more from Bulgaria's overall social and economic development than from specific progress in the healthcare system. With few exceptions, child mortality in the 28 districts does not directly depend on the status of healthcare services represented in the number of beds, obstetricians and other factors. Lagging dynamics in the effort to address perinatal mortality and underweight births, however, require decisive measures for improving the quality of obstetric and gynecological aid.

Overall data give reason to believe that by 2015 Bulgaria will achieve at least two of its child mortality targets – under-five mortality down to 9.5 per 1,000 live births and total infant (under-one) mortality down to 7 per 1,000 live births. If the current rate of improvement is sustained, even better results can be expected for these indicators.

Indicator dynamics under **Goal 5 – improve maternal health** – necessitate a change of targets. Maternal mortality of 7.3/100,000 live births in 2005 corresponds to five deaths across Bulgaria. On the other hand, cervical cancer morbidity has been alarmingly increasing, from 16/100,000 in 1990 to 27.7/100,000 in 2002 and 29.4/100,000 in 2006. Therefore the target for *Considerable reduction in maternal mortality* should be replaced with a new target, *Considerable reduction in cervical cancer morbidity and mortality*. The ambition will be to reduce new cases of cervical cancer down to 15/100,000 women by 2015.

Positive dynamics are reported for the other target: reduc-

⁸³ Ranking of the Inter-Parliamentary Union by 31.08.2007, „Women in National Parliaments“.

tion of abortions. The frequency of abortions in 2006 was 504/1,000 live births – meaning that the set target of 550/1,000 live births by 2015 has already been achieved. Some districts, however, still show extremely high indicators – in 2006 abortions in Dobrich exceeded the country average by 164% followed by Targovishte at 121%. Total progress under *frequency of abortions* is most likely the result of increasing use of condoms for protection from infections, particularly HIV/AIDS.

The indicator *Pregnant women under medical monitoring (until the third month of pregnancy)* shows alarming setbacks. The set target is to regain by 2015 the baseline level from 1990, but the indicator values are not increasing. On the contrary, they have fallen down to 64.5% in 2006 from 76.1% in 2003.

To include more pregnant women under medical surveillance, outpatient obstetricians should partially obtain the status of „district obstetricians“. For the newly introduced target – *Reduce cervical cancer morbidity* – the most necessary step is to launch mass screening. Combined with vaccination, mass screening is the most effective approach for the full eradication of this lethal and disabling disease.

The sixth Millennium Development Goal is also about human health and aims to limit the spread of HIV/AIDS, syphilis and tuberculosis. The spread of **HIV/AIDS** in Bulgaria is for now under control and remains under the epidemiological threshold of 1%. The number of registered HIV cases, however, has increased threefold from 2002 up to 814 cases at end-2007. Particularly alarming is the spread of HIV/AIDS among young people under 25 years (who accounted for 36% of reported new cases in 2007). The current epidemiological situation in Bulgaria, the neighboring Black Sea countries and Western Europe indicates there is a serious danger of concentrated epidemic outbreaks among injecting drug users, men having sex with men and prostituting men and women. Therefore two new indicators will be added tracking HIV prevalence among injecting drug users and men having sex with men. The objective is to limit the spread of HIV under 5% in each group.

Like in most European countries recently, the spread of **tuberculosis** in Bulgaria has been increasing. Tuberculosis incidence was 25.9/100,000 people in 1990 and 40.1/100,000 in 2005. The epidemiological situation in Bulgaria shows that the goal to reduce tuberculosis cases by half down to 20 per 100,000 persons in 2015 is overambitious and should be revised with the more realistic target of 22/100,000. Key factors contributing to the resurgence of tuberculosis include the appearance of extremely resistant forms of the disease, the fast increase in HIV cases, and the growing numbers of most-at-risk people. In 2007 the government launched a new National Program for Tuberculosis Prevention and Control in Bulgaria (2007–2011) and a Program for Improving TB Control in Bulgaria, financed by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Syphilis morbidity in the EU and in Bulgaria characteristically shows cyclic dynamics caused primarily by changing patterns of sexual behavior. After a peak in 1990–2000, syphilis morbidity began to subside, down to 7.7/100,000 in 2005 and 6.6/100,000 in 2006. Reducing new cases of syphilis to 5 per 100,000 by 2015 is a realistic goal. It will depend on several factors – limiting the spread of syphilis among the highest risk groups (injecting drug users, prostituting men and women and young Roma men) and limiting the cases of congenital syphilis, which lately have alarmingly increased.

Millennium Development Goal 7 is about ensuring environmental sustainability. In accordance with international recommendations, one new target was added: *Reverse the loss of biodiversity by 2010*. Another modification is connected with the Natura 2000 network. The target proportion of protected territories by 2015 is revised from 12% to 34%. At the end of 2007 protected areas covered 28% of Bulgaria's territory.

Bulgaria is successfully meeting its obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the 1988 baseline. Greenhouse gas emissions were 70,718 Gg CO² equivalent in 2006, a 50.14% reduction from the 1988 baseline compared to the obligation for 8% reduction under the Kyoto Protocol.

The proportion of the population covered by organized waste collection and disposal systems has grown from 80.2% in 2001 to 90.3% in 2006. Central water supply systems already cover 98.9% of Bulgaria's population.

Progress in the establishment of waste water treatment plants is relatively slower. The share of people served has marginally increased to 41.1% in 2006 from 40% in 2001.

The most significant domestic disparities concern the establishment of environmental infrastructure. Whereas almost 100% of urban dwellers benefit from organized waste collection, the proportion for rural dwellers is under 40%. The district centers Vidin, Kurdzhali, Russe and Silistra have no waste water treatment plants, and plants are still under construction in Blagoevgrad, Pazardjik, Targovishte, Stara Zagora and Haskovo.

Goal 8 – Partnership for development, was completely revised according to Bulgaria's new status as an EU member. By 2015 Bulgaria sets the goal to complete the transition from a recipient of international aid to a donor of official development assistance (ODA). That will require its effective participation in EU overall development cooperation policy. More specifically, by 2010 Bulgaria will strive to contribute annually 0.17% of GNI (gross national income) on official development aid compared to 0.053% in 2007. ODA allocations should grow to 0.33% by 2015.

To achieve these goals, Bulgaria will create a Development Agency and will define specific thematic and regional priorities, as well as specific ways for providing ODA. The Development Cooperation Concept elaborated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sets priorities on fighting poverty and improving the quality of life. Target regions for Bulgaria include South East Europe, the Black Sea region and – in the future – Africa, where EU has decided to channel 50% of its development assistance.

The achievement of these goals requires first and foremost the support of Bulgarian citizens, for many of which the average EU standard is still a difficult to achieve, far-off prospect. Bulgarian society needs a profound change of values and attitudes to face the country's new global responsibilities.

In conclusion, Bulgaria's eight Millennium Development Goals are largely intertwined with one another. In the strongly competitive environment of the European Union, high incomes are unthinkable without competitive, good quality education. Economic progress needs good healthcare because a long-lived and productive workforce is indispensable. Higher incomes and employment in turn will lead to better access to education, lower child and maternal mortality, more care for socially sensitive diseases like HIV/AIDS, syphilis and tuberculosis, and greater responsibility to the environment.

Behind overall national achievements, however, there are dramatic disparities. Major contrasts can be seen in all social areas – incomes, education and healthcare. They jeopardize sustainable development, because they create a soil for internal conflict on social, economic, regional or ethnic grounds. Furthermore, Bulgaria is part of our global home and global poverty is not something Bulgarian citizens can pretend to ignore – not only because of human solidarity and Bulgaria's international commitments, but also because overwhelming global disparities lead to upheavals that affect all.

On the whole, in 2003–2008 Bulgaria has achieved significant progress against the defined goals. As economic, educational and health standards come closer to EU levels, both Bulgarian citizens and EU institutions will increasingly insist on better governance, too.