

B U L G A R I A

National Human Development Report

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# Are we prepared for European Union funds?

Challenges and opportunities  
for local development actors



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*The figurine on the cover of the report embodies the idea that every movement happens for a reason. It was chosen for the National Human Development Report to express our belief that supported by EU funds Bulgaria will move forward in its development.*

## From the UNDP Resident Representative

*“Ultimately human development is about the realisation of potential. It is about what people can do and what they can become and about the freedom they have to exercise real choices in their lives.”*  
(Human Development Report, November 2006)

The above is also an idea at the core of the founding of the modern Bulgarian state, which in 1991 was included in the Bulgarian Constitution: “The Republic of Bulgaria shall guarantee the life, dignity and rights of the individual and shall create conditions conducive to the free development of the individual and of civil society.” It is also an idea at the core of European culture: 2,350 years ago, Aristotle said “Wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking, for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else” – the something else is the opportunity for people to realize their potential as human beings.

This report is about some of the ways in which Bulgarians can realize their potential. The fact that Bulgarians have potential is reflected in what they have accomplished over the last years – recovering from a deep financial and social crisis just nine years ago, building an EU member state and a place to which tourists, and increasingly investors, flock. It is reflected in Bulgaria being a country categorised as having human development with a ranking 12 places higher than its ranking in terms of income. It is reflected in the value people put on education, and the sacrifices parents and grandparents will make to give their children and grandchildren the chance for a good education.

That Bulgaria has opportunities to realize this potential is demonstrated by the amount of support the EU has committed to help Bulgaria’s development in the coming years – 12 billion euro until 2013. But the opportunities are not just about money. There are opportunities for increased investment and trade, but also for much more intense contact with EU member states and their citizens – whether in terms of culture, governance, business, or local development experiences.

However, as all Bulgarians know, along with the opportunities they have to “climb up the ladder of development”<sup>i</sup> there are many barriers to this potential being realized. This report is about some of the biggest barriers, including the inadequate capacity there is among all the partners – whether in national government, local government, business and NGOs – to access and to use effectively the EU funds available to Bulgaria. But while the focus is on such capacity related to EU funds, the issues raised are also relevant to the capacities in government and society to manage the many other changes that come with EU membership, including the capacity to define, and redefine the policies needed for Bulgaria’s development as an EU member state, so that it is competitive, and so that its achievements translate into increasing human development for all Bulgarians.

Therefore one of the key findings of the report, based on both extensive surveys and comparative studies with other EU member states, is that much more needs to be done to build such capacities and partnerships at the local level. If this investment in capacity is made now, it is much more likely that EU membership will lead to rapid and sustained improvements in human development and, linked to this, to Bulgaria’s ability to compete with Europe and within the world economy. Such a transformation will be in the interest of all Bulgarians, and in the interest of all Europeans.

Of course there are many other elements to this, such as sound macroeconomic policy, a stable and well functioning political system, and a justice system seen as effective by both Bulgarians and Europe. But all the above will not translate into improved lives for most Bulgarians, without a dramatic improvement in the capacity of all partners to use the EU funds. Bulgaria could also take a slower “learn by doing” approach, but in a situation where Bulgarians have the lowest incomes in the European

<sup>i</sup> Sachs, J., 2006, The End of Poverty.

Union, where there are already some doubts about the benefits of EU membership, and where competition from other countries could make it hard for Bulgaria to “catch-up”, Bulgaria does not have the luxury to take a “go-slow” approach.

As the report highlights, the good news is that more and more people realise this, and there is progress. There is more knowledge of how to do this, and more resources as well, including in a number of new initiatives by the Government. We hope this report helps Bulgarians build on this, and at this crucial moment in the country’s history, create the conditions to build “an enabling environment in which people can enjoy long, healthy and creative lives”<sup>ii</sup> and where development “expands the real freedoms that people enjoy”<sup>iii</sup>. We in UNDP are committed to continuing to support Bulgarians in this process.



*Neil Bulme*  
*December 2006*

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<sup>ii</sup> Mahbub al Haq.

<sup>iii</sup> Amartya Sen.

## FOREWORD

The development of a country seldom sees miracles. Perhaps many envision the following seven years as a kind of miracle for Bulgaria – accession to the European Union will bring to the country not only EUR 12.224 billion<sup>iv</sup>, but also unique development opportunities within the largest economic block in the world.

The results of seemingly accidental events, however, are always predestined by the previous actions of individuals or the society at large. The scope and pace of desired changes in Bulgaria depend entirely on its being prepared to take advantage of these emerging opportunities, in particular how well EU funds will be used to attain economic and social cohesion. Therefore the ability of the participants in this process – the administration, the business and civil society – to stand up to the challenge will be decisive if the quality of life in Bulgaria is to improve.

EU cohesion policies, whose implementation funds Bulgaria will be able to tap effective 1 January 2007, aim at overcoming disparities and achieving cohesive development across regions and member states, including sustainable growth, more jobs and greater competitiveness. The goals of this policy are in unison with the work and mandate of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to promote sustainable human development and to strengthen social capital and good governance.

The concept of human development rests on one fundamental principle – that people are the greatest wealth of any country. Their development, knowledge and dreams are the most powerful and far-reaching engine of prosperity. EU cohesion policies are not only about economic growth – their goal is to create a level economic ground where all social groups will be able to participate equitably. For that reason UNDP – Bulgaria decided to use its Human Development Report for 2006 and to look at the challenges Bulgaria is facing to benefit from these opportunities.

Bulgaria is already experiencing a classical phenomenon of development where positive macroeconomic results are dramatically at odds with the subjective perceptions of society; instead of galvanising stronger optimism for the future, these good results breed pessimism.<sup>v</sup> A similar situation may recur after Bulgaria joins the EU because at first direct benefits will not spread evenly. That is why in 2006 UNDP – Bulgaria is looking at the issue of capacity to participate in EU funds through the eyes of local development stakeholders – the business, local and district governments and the non-governmental sector. Besides the central government, these are the three groups of actors whose capability to effectively use EU money will determine whether as many people as possible feel the benefits of EU membership and take part in Bulgaria's development.

Since 1999 UNDP has been consistently concerned with issues of local and regional development. In the course of all these years UNDP has built a comprehensive toolkit to support local development stakeholders. Days before accession, that foundation can be used to improve Bulgaria's preparedness to benefit from the opportunities extended by the EU.

Great opportunities often conceal a wake of problems – it is not by accident that the Chinese hieroglyph for opportunity also stands for risk. There are hardly many people who doubt that EU funds will contribute to Bulgaria's welfare. The key risk associated with EU cohesion policies is not that they will not have an impact but that the impact may be far too small. The experience of the so-called 'cohesion countries' (Ireland, Portugal, Greece and Spain) showed that there are different strategies to implement policies and therefore different results.

During the negotiations for accession the Bulgarian Government managed to gain agreement to the highest share of funds seen as a percentage of the gross domestic product at 3.6% of GDP. It will be a delusion, however, to regard this merely as a diplomatic success because the percentage was made up according to the same formula which was used to determine the

<sup>iv</sup> Financial perspectives 2007-2013. Agency for Economic Analysis and Forecasts, December 2005.

<sup>v</sup> An optimistic theory about the pessimism of transition. Association Global Bulgaria Initiative, 2003 – 2004.

needs of every other country. With a GDP purchase power parity equalling only 32%<sup>vi</sup> of that in the EU 25 member states, Bulgaria is one of the poorest countries joining the European Union.

That should not be a discouragement. It should be an even stronger incentive to use EU funds more efficiently to promote economic and social cohesion.

The report shares the view that development can only be achieved with the active involvement of the business, and if the implemented projects are economically viable. Funding of ideas that are simply good may contribute to development, but only by chance. From this perspective accession to the EU is often regarded as a collision of two concepts of development – the so-called social and the economic. It is usually argued that a higher level of social protection checks economic growth and vice versa, high competitiveness inevitably undermines social standards. This is an artificial choice. Without economic development there are no means for social policy, and without meaningfully targeted social spending there can be no rapid growth – growth will inevitably be extensive and will never catch up with the most advanced EU countries. For instance, funding in accessible education should be viewed not only as social spending but also as investment in qualified workforce. One example could be potential investments for economic inclusion of the Roma people. Instead of putting a strain on the social system, they could become yet another impulse for Bulgaria's economic growth.<sup>vii</sup>

At the same time we should never forget that the use of structural funds is public interference with development and the market mechanism. Falling back on these funds should always have a clear rationale, if they are to avoid the opposite effect – instead of providing solutions to existing problems, they could capsule the status quo by funding ineffective programmes that would otherwise have been reformed. EU funds should be a catalyst, not a brake on reform.

Such public interventions are moreover carried out with public money – they are paid for by all taxpayers but directly benefit only some of them. The society expects that the government will compensate market failure, but it demands guarantees that the funds will be used expediently. If public interventions are to be efficient and effective, there must be monitoring and evaluation of underpinning policies and programmes. The best way to do that is to involve representatives of local development actors who bear the consequences of various programme decisions made by the central government. Who can judge the impact of development assistance but those who need development?

The introduction summarises the surveys that provided the basis for the Human Development Report. It outlines the essence of EU cohesion policies, the specific characteristics of the business, the non-governmental sector, local governments and district administrations, and their role in working with the structural funds. The first three chapters of the report focus on key aspects of how prepared are the three groups of local development actors to participate in the structural funds – municipal and district governments, the business and non-governmental organisations. That sequence logically follows the roles that these three groups will play in the utilisation of EU funds. The fourth chapter looks at partnership as the shortest way to development. It presents examples of good practices of several EU member states in improving capacity and highlights the cooperation experience between the three groups of local development participants. General conclusions are provided in the fifth chapter along with recommendations on how to strengthen the capacity of local development actors to participate in the operation of structural funds.

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<sup>vi</sup> Eurostat, 2005.

<sup>vii</sup> According to a report by the Open Society Foundation, the potential benefits of Roma inclusion currently amount in the range of BGN 30 billion, which is roughly equal to the overall amount of funds Bulgaria is expected to receive from the European Union (considering inflation).

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