

**Remarks of Acting USAID Administrator Henrietta H. Fore
USAID/Bulgaria Closing Event
Sofia Hall, Kempinski Hotel
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(Translation will be done simultaneously)

Introduced by: USAID/Bulgaria Mission Director Mike Fritz

Thank you, Mike. And thank you, Minister Vassilev for your wonderful sentiments.

It is an honor and truly my pleasure to join you to celebrate what is an extraordinary milestone for Bulgaria, and for the U.S.

Government. For the past 17 years, we have worked as partners in Bulgaria's transition. Today, as we mark the end of one aspect of our transformative relationship, we also celebrate the dawn of a new partnership that will sustain Bulgaria's exceptional progress for generations to come.

Looking back, I am awed by the magnitude of the historic changes that have been achieved in less than two decades. The Bulgarian people have recreated their nation—transforming oppression into openness, poverty into prosperity, fear into freedom. A new EU member, a key U.S. ally, a member of NATO—this is the Bulgaria we celebrate tonight.

Throughout this epic era, America has been a constant friend and supporter of Bulgaria and other nations in the region. On November 28, 1989, as democratic revolutions across the region began to ignite, the U.S. Congress and President George Herbert Walker Bush pledged targeted assistance to those who would take “substantive steps toward institutionalizing political democracy and economic pluralism.” This was the Support for East European Democracy Act, or SEED Act, which laid the foundation for two decades of consistent, tangible U.S. support.

Indeed, great achievements have been made. You know them well. Without your peerless perseverance and deep dedication, Bulgaria’s transformation would not have been possible. Funding from the US and other donors can make little difference if the people in a country do not want change or are not willing to work to realize their goals. The United States is very proud to have provided resources and moral support that have helped catalyze such impressive change in Bulgaria.

What strikes me as special about Bulgaria is how so many Bulgarians and their leaders embraced new ideas and sought to apply them to the legal system, the economy, the structure of government. You were not afraid to embrace change and to take

risks, even when times were tough. And I know from some of the conversations I have had here that for a while they were very tough indeed. Despite these challenges—or perhaps, as a result of them—together we forged immensely productive partnerships which have served as the cornerstone of Bulgaria’s progress.

- In collaboration with USAID, Bulgarian municipalities have launched more than 140 'one stop' customer service and information centers to deliver streamlined, responsive services to citizens.
- Thirty-two Bulgarian courts have received technical and funding support from USAID to take concrete steps to increase efficiency and transparency to the public.
- USAID has worked with key stakeholders to develop two energy institutions—the Energy Regulator and the Energy Efficiency Center—and implement initiatives through which hospitals, schools and other municipal buildings saved hundreds of gigawatts of electricity and improved citizens' health and safety.

- In the private sector, USAID-funded activities have disbursed 53,000 loans worth \$68 million to Bulgarian micro-enterprises. These loans have supported more than 78,000 thousand jobs—slightly more than half the estimated 130,000 total jobs that have been created directly by USAID projects since 1991.
- USAID assisted with the first privatization of banks and later with regulation and management of the banking sector. Banking assets have grown more than 500 percent since 1997.

For each of these accomplishments, there are scores of others, equally impressive, equally inspiring. All a result of partnerships that have been created with visionary, talented Bulgarian partners in the public, private, and non-governmental sectors which will endure long after USAID assistance ends.

Today we are celebrating not just an end, but the beginning of a new kind of relationship. For today we are celebrating your country's transition from development aid recipient to USG development partner.

The over \$600 million dollars the United States has invested in Bulgaria was a wise investment indeed. It has supported capacity building and the development of NGOs and other organizations and institutions to become sustainable partners for continued social, political, and economic development. It has fostered collaborative relationships between many U.S. and Bulgarian institutions, public and private. As you embark on your new future, these partnerships will serve you well in your integration with the European Union. The tools, capacity, and the expertise to guide and propel you further on the road to reform now reside in Bulgaria.

As this chapter draws to a close, another begins. The sustainable partnerships created here constitute a legacy of great hope and promise for these partnerships to evolve. Today I visited the National Institute of Justice and saw firsthand the impact achieved in Bulgaria's judicial sector. But as you know, there is still much work to be done. The U.S., through our Department of Justice, looks forward to continuing our relationships and to see the NIJ serve as center of excellence and a model in judicial reform in the region.

The Bulgarian American Enterprise Fund, established by USAID a decade ago, has been highly successful in investing in private enterprise development. So successful that over \$200 million in profits have led to the establishment of a legacy institution, the America for Bulgaria Foundation. This new legacy foundation will promote business development and support the growth of the Bulgarian economy for years to come, through programs such as business education, entrepreneurial initiatives, leadership development, support of NGOs and key competitive business sectors.

At this time, I would like to announce that while USAID assistance in Bulgaria is ending, our support of civil society will also endure. We recently signed a grant for \$10 million with the German Marshall Fund's Black Sea Trust. This marks the beginning of a 10-year partnership to strengthen cross-border ties, civic participation, democratic governance, and rule of law in the Black Sea region. Bulgaria will have the opportunity to participate in Fund activities.

In coming years, I have no doubt that the U.S. and Bulgaria will continue our collaboration to promote democracy and economic growth in the region and elsewhere around the world. Your

transformation will serve as a model for others who struggle to achieve lasting peace and prosperity. As donor partners, I look forward to working together to share Bulgaria's success story with those who may benefit from your achievement.

This is a day of jubilation and for reflection on the extraordinary accomplishments achieved. But I urge you not to become complacent. As Americans, we know well from our own experience that maintaining a strong democracy and a flourishing economy demands constant vigilance. It is up to you to keep Bulgaria on its promising path. The United States stands by you in that courageous endeavor.

Thank you.