

CONCLUSIONS OF THE SUMMIT OF THE PRIME MINISTERS OF THE CEFTA COUNTRIES, BUDAPEST, 19-20 OCTOBER 1999

The differences in opinions on the liberalization of trade with agricultural goods at the CEFTA market was one of the major issues discussed at the CEFTA prime ministerial meeting. "Although Bulgaria doesn't introduce any restrictions for the free trade within CEFTA, it is reasonable further liberalization to be combined with review of the policies of the countries, especially on export of agricultural goods", PM Kostov said in his speech at the meeting.

The liberalization must apply to domestic trade as well, and prices must be decontrolled and subsidies discontinued, said also Kostov. Otherwise there will be disproportions between subsidized agricultural production and subsidized export, and subsidized producers will be opposed to those who do not get subsidies. This is a problem of the Bulgarian agriculture too for it is not subsidized. By its position at the CEFTA meeting, Bulgarian Government protects the agricultural producers.

Bulgarian PM Ivan Kostov proposed for discussion the idea CEFTA to become a transitional organization taking the countries of Southeastern Europe to EU membership.

"I want to share an idea with you - that CEFTA take a stand on the European integration of the Southeast European countries and on the way in which it will be conducted. The establishment of a new community for free trade among the countries of Southeastern Europe, which has been formally proposed, will involve new initial efforts and many controversies of a various nature, while CEFTA is an operating organization. All prime ministers of the CEFTA nations admit how much they have learnt in CEFTA about what it will be in the European Union", PM Ivan Kostov said.

Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Drnovsek expressed his opinion that it is worth discussing how CEFTA can cooperate with the rest of the countries in Southeast Europe and whether the organization will enlarge, opening for countries like Bosnia, Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia.

Regarding industrial products, CEFTA will be a genuinely free trade zone from January 2000, earlier than originally planned, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban told a press conference held during the annual CEFTA meeting in Budapest on Wednesday. The declaration issued by the forum acknowledges the successful liberalization of trade in industrial and other nonagricultural goods, noting that the duties for these classes of goods will be lifted altogether as of January 1 next year.

CEFTA prime ministers decided to set up a new subcommittee to coordinate the battle against organized crime and economic crimes, Mr Orban said, adding that law enforcement agencies will also participate on the subcommittee. The prime ministers also agreed to intensify the work of the agrarian subcommittee to resolve farm trade disputes, he said.

Bulgarian expectations from the EU summit in Helsinki was the other main topic of conversation between Bulgarian and Hungarian PMs Ivan Kostov and Viktor Orban. "I welcome the European Commission recommendation for opening negotiations for accession to all the candidates for EU membership", Viktor Orban said. He expressed his

expectation that the opening of the negotiations will be a fact, as well as that a date will be appointed for the end of the accession negotiations for those that have already started them.

Statistics shows an increase of Bulgaria's trade with the CEFTA member states by 17% in 1994-98. CEFTA's share in Bulgaria's commercial exchange grew from 3.9% in 1996 to 5.4% in 1998.

The first half of 1999 saw the biggest growth in Bulgarian export to Slovenia - a total value of 21.9 million dollars making up 1.3% of all Bulgarian exports. In the same period trade with the CEFTA member states was worth a total of 223.5 million dollars, including CEFTA imports for 150.9 million dollars and Bulgarian exports to CEFTA for 72.6 million dollars totalled.

On the proposal of the Polish Prime Minister, Poland will host the next meeting of CEFTA.

[Quelle: <http://www.cefta.org/meetings/summits/1999/conclusions.htm>]