

That time of great changes was also a time of great discoveries and bold actions in the country's foreign policy, a period during which its new orientation, its new goals and priorities, its new principles and norms were being defined, a time when new faces in diplomacy were emerging and a new style of pursuing the nation's foreign policy was taking hold.

What followed afterwards was more or less routine movement within the already established boundaries of the acceptable, within set goals and priorities, principles and norms. Anyone who ventured beyond these boundaries was doomed to fail, as did the government of Prime Minister Zhan Videnov when it decided to strike NATO off the list of priorities of Bulgaria's European integration, or to upset the country's Balkan policy by showing preferences for one group of neighbors at the expense of another.

If the Presidency had a leading role to play in formulating the new foreign policy of Bulgaria, this was not only due to the circumstance that of all government institutions, the President has the longest term of office. Much more important than that were the relatively broad powers constitutionally vested in the Presidency, and my personal willingness to make the most of them.

By saying this, it is by no means my intention to deny or play down the role of the other institutions of State or of the political forces; neither is it my desire to underestimate the role of parliamentarians, cabinet ministers, diplomats or experts.

However, if there was a single office that survived seven Cabinets and three Parliaments, with all their broadly fluctuating attitudes towards one national priority or another; an office that weathered the all-too-frequent attempts to change the emphasis of Bulgaria's foreign policy; an office that steadied the course and ensured continuity, it was the Office of the President. Not accidentally it was the Presidency that became the target of some of the fiercest attacks launched against any government institution – both directly, through allegations of the so-called 'offices of the President', and circuitously, through the consistent slandering and denigration of ambassadors, diplomats and other Presidential appointees who firmly and consistently upheld the country's newly-forged Euro-Atlantic orientation.

The roots of Bulgaria's new foreign policy, of course, should be traced back to the democratic changes effected within the country during the period immediately following 1989. Without these changes, the new foreign policy of Bulgaria would have been unthinkable. If we need to be

even more specific, the roots of the country's new foreign policy lie in the Bulgarian people's powerful drive for freedom and democracy during the entire 1990.

As we get to the bottom of it all, we are bound to conclude that the true guarantor of democratic change were the ordinary citizens of Bulgaria, those who during the frosty winter of 1989-1990 shivered in sub-zero temperatures at pro-democracy rallies in the streets and town squares, those who voluntarily mounted guard under the windows of the National Palace of Culture to show their support for the opposition delegates at the 'Round Table' negotiations, and when these failed, did not hesitate to once again pour out in the streets and town squares of the major cities to demand the disbanding of the hated thought police, the dissolution of the grassroots cells of the Bulgarian Communist Part operating by place of employment, the abolition of Art. 1 of the erstwhile Constitution [cementing the leadership of the BCP in all walks of life], elections for a Constituent National Assembly, etc.

It is possible that claiming such a direct link between domestic and international politics might seem a little far-fetched to some. The truth is, however, that no matter how relatively separate a sphere a nation's foreign policy is, it can never become totally independent of its domestic affairs. Especially at such turning points in history. On the contrary, it is in times like these that the direct interdependency between one and the other becomes all too manifest.

On the other hand, however, it would be wrong to underestimate the relative independence of a nation's foreign policy in regard to its domestic one, or to play down the truly enormous potential opportunities which an autonomous foreign policy has to offer. Because of there is one positive thing that has been accomplished over the years since 1989, these are the achievements and accomplishments of Bulgaria's foreign policy. Here things are for real, you can put your finger on them, you can reach out and touch them, which is more than can be said about, for example, the pseudo-reforms in the economic or the social sphere.

Today there is hardly anyone who can tell for sure what part of the agricultural land in Bulgaria is fully restituted to its rightful owners, or what proportion of the land that is declared restituted is indeed back in their possession in its actual boundaries, on the strength of a duly issued title of ownership. Hardly anyone can tell for sure what percentage of the erstwhile state and municipal assets have been privatized, or how lawful and transparent such privatization has been over the years.