

The visit of Hillary Clinton in Sofia - between shale gas and assessment of the Bulgarian transition to democracy

Interview of the President of the Institute of Modern Politics Borislav Tsekov for News Agency "Focus"

"Focus": Mr. Tsekov, the Institute of Modern Politics has markedly pro-Western orientation and American partnerships and usually have information, how do you assess the visit of U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton here? What signals were given? What remained hidden from the observers and the public?

Borislav Tsekov: It's true the assessments made by the Institute of Modern Politics are always based on a broad information base, including the basis of our partnership with political and civic factors in the U.S. What is important to emphasize when looking for the true meaning of the visit of Mrs. Clinton is that it was not a retaliatory gesture of invitation of the Bulgarian government, or demonstration of special treatment for this government as some circles associated with the Foreign Ministry tried to interpret it. This visit was prompted by a specific purpose - energy geostrategy of the U.S. and the contradictory position of Bulgarian government to research and production of shale gas. The fact that it is a matter of days the special adviser on energy issues Richard Morningstar, which is quite "heavy artillery" in Washington, to visit Sofia is a clear sign of this. It was a definitely unpleasant surprise for the Americans that the government of Boyko Borisov changed its position in 180 degrees on the issue of shale gas. It seems however that their diplomats in Sofia quite underestimated this topic and rose-colored glasses that they have put in the last two years seem to have prevented them to assist in clarifying the real technology improvements for the extraction of shale gas, economic and environmental consequences.

"Focus": Why the US keep so much of the shale gas? Is it only a matter of economic interests?

Borislav Tsekov: This is a matter of geostrategy, the balance of energy interests in the world. With these new technologies, the U.S. try to provide a new alternative to dependence on Russian gas. The decisions of the government - first to issue permit for research, and second - to impose a moratorium on shale gas are equally wrong.

"Focus": Why?

Borislav Tsekov: These decisions were taken without serious public discussion and without hearing all the arguments. There are two issues that the country did not receive a clear answer - safety and economic potential. It is important to know for example that these technologies really evolved in recent years and the issue of shale gas can not be confined to this notorious film "Gasland." In our country there is no real public debate on shale gas. On one hand there are green movements' protests, and on the other we see purely formal statements "for" shale gas from people inside and outside parliament who tried to "shine" by the visit of Secretary of State. If you want to discuss the topic thoroughly matured, then there is a whole series of questions to be answered. Like what is true - the black paintings drawn from environmental groups and the leftist parties for the poisoned groundwater and ecological catastrophe or what is seen in practice in Poland, USA, Canada - high-tech production and intact environment. Objective information is needed to allow our society to make informed choices. Another group of questions is how this will affect the economic development of regions and the country. You will find thousands of new jobs in New York, where the so called plan "Cuomo" led to more than 100 thousand new jobs? We should consider whether the shale gas extraction will increase noticeably revenue in local budgets and will push forward their economic progress. We should consider also whether the shale gas will drop the prices of gas so that it felt every household, as happened in the U.S. The extraction of shale gas in the U.S. dropped the price more than tripled.

"Focus": Do you think such a discussion is possible in our country after protests against the shale gas?

Borislav Tsekov: Each discussion is possible as long as there are serious social circles and political factors that seek the truth and national interest.

"Focus": Some saw lobbies of "Gazprom" behind the protests against shale gas in Bulgaria.

Borislav Tsekov: Even if its is true, I see nothing wrong with everyone to assert its interests and views.

"Focus": What else makes an impression on the visit of Secretary of State?

Borislav Tsekov: There is something that out of the mainstream attention, but it is a very important nuance. Hillary Clinton expressed appreciation for the unique Bulgarian transition to democracy and efforts, reforms and "stubbornness" as she put it, in the last 20 years. This is an indirect and polite response to the attempts of ruling party GERB to say that almost everything before their government was bad. This statement of the U.S. top diplomat is not only an objective assessment that one can not deny the achievements of previous governments who scored Bulgaria's EU and NATO accession and conducted economic reforms. This is a clear sign to all political and civic circles, which have their real contribution to the country's development over the past 20 years.