

PRESS RELEASE

In response to the high interest on behalf of the printed and electronic media to BARDA (Bulgarian Association of Regional Development Agencies and Business Centres), and with regard to the interview published on the website of Deutsche Welle Radio (DW-world.de) with our employee Miss Milena Dacheva, in two parts – on 30.07.2008 and 01.08.2008, we would like to announce the official position of our organisation.

The interview given by Miss Dacheva, Head of “International Programmes and Funding” Department at the BARDA Head Office, is not an official statement of BARDA Governing Body, has not been agreed or prepared by BARDA’s management, but is her own personal view, based on her extensive personal experience in the sphere discussed.

After consulting the members of the national network of Regional Development Agencies and a discussion of the Board of Directors of BARDA, the official position of the organisation is as follows:

- The organisation supports the views expressed by its employee on the main topic of the interview – corruption practices in the pre-accession fund management and the beginning of the work with the Structural and Cohesion Funds. The statements are true **in principle**; such processes exist; they distort and stultify the use of public resources for the achievement of the development objectives of our country.
- The reaction of representatives of the central public administration is quite odd, as the discussed practices and weaknesses are widely known by the non-governmental sector, the business and the citizens in our country, as well as in Brussels, which became evident in the last monitoring reports of the EC on Bulgaria.
- The Regional Development Agencies and Business Centres, members of BARDA, express their implacability to any corruption practices in the European funds management in Bulgaria, the cases of conflict of interests, disguised in different forms; the non-observance of the European regulations and procedures. Besides the various practices we have been alarming for years about the insufficient capacity for the European Structural Funds absorption – both administrative and expert.

Important accents to the attention of public institutions, society and media are:

- ✓ The necessity of clear and non-perfunctory definition of the concept “conflict of interests” through a wide public debate and use of developed and established by the EU criteria;
- ✓ The necessity of creating an attitude of civil intolerance towards each and every case of breaching of rules, corruption practices or substitution of the purposes of actions, financed with public funds, not only those co-financed with the funds of the European Community, but also for spending our state budgets as well.
- ✓ It is extremely worrying that some of our members feel FEAR BARDA to take an open and clear position on the issues related to corruption. This fear suppresses a large part of the NGO sector, of the businesses in the country as well as the citizens, and creates apathy and non-confidence in the state system as a whole.
- ✓ Annoying is the reaction of the Minister of Public Administration and Administrative Reform, who in telephone calls of 01.08.2008 with the Executive Director of

BARDA, personally declared “war by all means” to a national network of non-governmental organisations, working in support of municipalities and the business for sustainable local and regional development. Is this the attitude of the Bulgarian state to citizens and non-governmental organisations, expressing concerns about the way in which the money from their taxes is spent? This attitude is in full contradiction to the main European principles of democracy and freedom of expression and thought and sends us back to the years before the changes in 1989 when the state used “all means” against the citizens, daring to take an active social position.

- ✓ The civil structures in the country, which were not established by the administration or with its “blessing”, work for the development of the local communities by performing activities and providing services, which are not provided by the state, getting no support of it! For it is generally known that larger part of the NGOs at regional and local level work not with the help but in spite of the indifference or the obstacles put by the state power.
- ✓ The necessity of in-depth re-assessment of the adequacy of the structures, determined to implement the sectoral and horizontal policies in the national Strategic Reference Framework. The assigned structures and mechanisms for the implementation of the policies (national responsibility), had been developed before the adoption of the EC Regulations of the Structural and Cohesion Funds and the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy for 2007-2013. The requirements for the further decentralization of their implementation have not been taken into account. **Example:** regarding the Regional Development Operational Programme – according to us, an impermissible and directly corruptive prerequisite is the fact, that in one administrative structure of the central executive power (the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works) are concentrated the processes of planning, programming, implementation, monitoring and control (Regional Development Programming Directorate General). Decentralized independent implementation bodies on a territorial (regional) principle have not been established. The same example applies to almost all Operational Programmes.

A number of other accents can be added, unfortunately, as the first two years of our membership in the EU were lost and filled with empty promises and simulation of preparation for full integration of our country in the European diversity.

In conclusion: The Bulgarian Association of Regional Development Agencies and Business Centres – BARDA, is a non-governmental, independent national organisation, established with the direct support of the European Community. The members of BARDA are organisations with expertise in the spheres of regional development planning and management and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, but not investigating authorities. That is why, they can only inform the society, express concerns about spreading of such practices, and at the same time, their hope that the competent institutions will start doing their job in a profound and responsible manner, a job, for which Bulgarian taxpayers pay them.

Thank you for the opportunity to express the official position of the organisation on the interviews discussed.