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## The Corporate Social Responsibility Subject in the Bulgarian Print Media

At the beginning of 2007, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the European Commission initiated a special project intended to advance a better understanding, a more comprehensive implementation and a more efficient reporting of corporate social responsibility practices at country and company level in eight new EU Member States and Candidate Countries. Within the framework of the project, eight national studies were conducted of the basic stakeholders in the sphere of corporate social responsibility: governments, business, non-governmental organisations, academic institutions, media and of their commitments and role in asserting a socially responsible conduct. A European synthesis report compared the progress achieved so far in the eight project countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Slovakia and Turkey and addressed recommendations to each of the communities that are instrumental in asserting and accelerating a corporate culture and governance style in which social responsibility is a motor force of sustainable development. The media figured prominently both in the analysis and in the recommendations of the European experts on the future place of corporate social responsibility in the "New Europe": in government policies, on the agenda of consumer groups and, above all, in business strategies and action plans.

"The place and the role of the media are critical," noted the authors of the regional study. "In all project countries the media market is small and media outlets are dependent on advertisers. A clear separation of publisher and owner is not the case, as there is no tradition of differentiating between editorial policy and the conduct and interaction of the medium with other actors on the market. Few specialised publications or representatives of the so-called quality press cover CSR issues in the eight project countries."

As a sequel to the conclusions of the national study and the European synthesis report, UNDP Bulgaria launched a monitoring of the Bulgarian press coverage of the subject of "corporate social responsibility". In the course of eight months, a specialised unit of the Bulgarian News Agency (BTA) compiled a daily press clipping of items on the subject published in Bulgarian print media. The publications were analysed by Alpha Research Ltd.

The decision to publish the analysis was prompted by our desire to help expand the number of media that adequately and competently cover the subject of corporate social responsibility.

The media and journalists can play an essential role in keeping business and the general public fully informed, as well as in cultivating an awareness and attitudes to CSR if the media themselves cross the barrier from perfunctory to to-the-point and meaningful coverage of this subject matter. "Reporting" or "covering" events, studies, good national or foreign practices is just one way in which the media can impact their target audiences. Another way is the adoption of a socially responsible conduct by the media groups themselves, following the example of major leaders in news reporting and opinions journalism such as *The Guardian* newspaper and foundation, the *Financial Times*, Reuters, *El Paiz* etc. Public relations and marketing agencies, too, can play a role of their own, helping business mater and implement CSR practices on an accelerated basis. Such agencies could include CSR in the portfolio of services offered to their clients.

Bulgaria is the only one of eight countries involved in the "Accelerating CSR in the New Europe" Project in which a national study of the media presence of the subject of corporate social responsibility has been conducted. We hope that the analysis can invite conclusions, and the baseline information on CSR, which is provided at the end of the study, can orient journalists and editorial offices that will be covering this subject from now on about ways of becoming active advocates and proponents of responsible conduct of all other stakeholders of the implementation of CSR as a national policy and governance culture.

#### **SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF THE PRESS CLIPPING:**

- The content analysis covers data of a BTA press clipping of items containing the words "corporate social responsibility" (CSR). More than 1,200 items mentioning one or several keywords appeared in the monitored media between 1 October 2007 and 4 April 2008. Of all items identified, more than 400 were disqualified owing to a lack of correspondence between the CSR subject and the action presented in the item. After elimination of the irrelevant items, 880 articles remained, and the analysis is based on them.
- Three tendencies stand out in the coverage of the subject: an emphasis on the personality and event aspect rather than on the cause; a fragmentary and sporadic approach. Readers who are unaware of and unfamiliar with the subject and who come across the CSR subject in the usual form of its media presence can hardly get an idea of what it is all about. The volume of the text telling about a particular event, especially if it involved popular political figures or celebrities, exceeds between ten

and fifteen-fold the text presenting the social commitment, problem or company which commits itself to addressing this problem. As a result, the message that gets across is an assertion of the image of the personalities involved rather than a promotion of a cause.

- The CSR subject is covered by the media in exceedingly positive terms. This, however, is largely determined by the nature of the events covered: most often parties or gatherings for the presentation of donations. The problems of the beneficiaries of these donations go largely under-reported, and the social commitments of business are associated to an even lesser extent with the specific social problem and the pursuit of consistent policies to address it. The critical or neutral opinions, if any, are precisely in this second aspect, expressed by the beneficiaries, independent experts and analysts. Conversely, the people who receive the most frequent and the most extensive media coverage speak mainly of the donations themselves rather than of the way in which they fit into a more comprehensive commitment or business policy. Moreover, the publications quite often focus on insignificant curious details of the social events (how the attendees were dressed, the bravery of a popular politician who fed the piranhas or the lion, gossip about the celebrities' private life etc.) This further deflects attention from the CSR subject, consigning it to the background.
- According to the intensity of publications, the media fall into two types: such that systematically follow the CSR subject, and other that cover the subject only sporadically. The *Dnevnik* newspaper is the unchallenged leader in the systematic coverage of the subject.
- The seasonal nature of data is largely timed in with key dates or events in the month during which the publications appear. The frequency peaks immediately before and after the Christmas season. Then the number of publications on the subject is treble the average monthly quantity.
- Thirty-five per cent of the items covering the subject appear on page 1 to 8 of the print media, and another 30 per cent are positioned on page 9 to 26. These are mainly news items or signed articles. Despite the prominent space they get in the media, two-thirds of the items do not exceed a length of 300 words, which is symptomatic of the more superficial coverage of the subject. A larger length of the items presupposes a more comprehensive presentation of the subject, as well as a round-up of the opinions of the various beneficiaries.

- Despite the prominent presence of the CSR subject in the Bulgarian print media, most of the items notably cover particular charity events or donations rather than sustained and long-term policies of Bulgarian business.
- The principal spokespersons on the subject are directors and company managers. Direct beneficiaries of the donations are quoted half less frequently.
- Even though CSR is above all a commitment of business to a socially responsible conduct, Bulgarian private business gets coverage as organiser of charity events or activities in just 2.5 per cent of the items. The sponsors of the action themselves, too, remain unnamed on a number of occasions, unlike the popular figures involved in the event.