**1. How did you receive the JAI decision, where Romania and Bulgaria were not accepted in Schengen, only Croatia was?**

This decision was not a surprise, given the fact that the recent weeks weren’t dominated only by speculations and rumours, but also bydirect statements by several Member States. Of course, perhaps as in Romania, Bulgaria invested a lot, and it took us many efforts to avoid this. We still had hope that the common sense will prevail. It turned out this decision is not a matter of technical criteria or any other practical reason, but most of all a purely political one. As of me, it becomes clear that the European concept of shared solidarity and free movement is being victimized by domestic political issues of one Member State.

You may count my statement as overdramatized, if you want, but this debate is yet another example where the idea for European democracy is transformedinto European hypocrisy.

**2. Is this decision a test for what we call the Europe of concentric circles - or Europe with 2 speeds -, or shouldn't we see things through these lenses yet?**

I would say this decision is not a test, but a proof of double standard treatment by several Member States towards others.

I don’t say our both countries don’t have areas for improvement, but I insist that we did a great job so far, that we made significant progress since the past 15 years and, let’s be honest, we are not the only countries facing problems with administrative burden and fraud.

Being an external border state is a huge responsibility. And I will never stop saying that responsibility is to be shared, not “covered” with funds for the ones facing the major burden and dealing with the threat.

**3. What is there left to do with this dossier? How feasible is decoupling Romania and Bulgaria, what would be the consequences?**

The rejection of Romania and Bulgaria was a package deal. Therefore, decoupling is out of the question now. The rumours for potential decoupling might have been intentional in order to open a crack in the unity of the two countries. Decoupling is difficult from a legal point of view because it cannot take place without amending decisions and legally binding texts. The latter would delay the entire process and it would be another reason for tension in the run-up to accession by the end of 2023.

With or without decoupling, there will be consequences for the entire EU. Some of those consequences are very unexpected. On 13 December, the Cohesion Monitoring Group of the EPP organised an event on successful EU investments in urban mobility and infrastructure. A key conclusion is that even the most expensive transport infrastructure projects in this part of the EU will suffer from the fact that the two countries are outside Schengen. The effects of EU’s major infrastructure projects will be hampered by the administrative bottlenecks linked to the non-Schengen border checks. On one hand, the EU is building faster motorways and railroads. On the other, it is slowing down the movement of people, goods and services by the rejection of Romania and Bulgaria. The left hand does not care what the right hand is doing. Is this the state of EU policies now?

**4. Is there a risk of feeding Eurosceptic platforms in Bulgaria?**

The Eurosceptic rhetoric is gaining more and more popularity in the European union and Bulgaria is not an exception. Situations and debates like this one are only feeding the beast, as people throughout Europe become more and more disappointed, and the core values seem to be neglected. This is dangerousm, as Euroscepticism is a poison for our Union. The developments in national elections should be precisely observed and analysed especially in the context of the forthcoming EU elections. Some politicians need to understand that the local win could bring a global defeat.