

## **U.S. to discuss Bulgarian missile shield role**

*by Tsvetelia Tsoleva and Anna Mudeva*

**REUTERS - Washington will hold preliminary talks with the Bulgarian government on hosting parts of a U.S. missile shield, Bulgarian Prime Minister Boiko Borisov said on Friday.**

Asked whether Bulgaria -- a NATO and European Union member -- would accept the U.S. plan, Borisov said Sofia should show solidarity.

**"This is not a decision that will be taken only by me," Borisov told reporters. "We are waiting replies from the European Commission and from the Bulgarian parliament."**

**He added: "My opinion is that we have to show solidarity. When you are a member of NATO, you have to work for the collective security."**

The expected talks with Sofia are part of a revamped U.S. missile defense approach taken by President Barack Obama since he scrapped a Bush-era plan for a radar site and interceptor rockets in the Czech Republic and Poland.

Last week, Bulgaria's neighbour and fellow NATO member, Romania, said its top defense body had approved Washington's plan to deploy interceptor missiles.

**A State Department spokesman said the facilities were due to become operational by 2015 and were aimed at defending against "current and emerging ballistic missile threats from Iran." He repeated that the new strategy should not worry Moscow.**

Russia sees the plan as a threat to its own nuclear arsenal and has bristled at what it sees as U.S. meddling in its sphere of influence. Most of Eastern Europe was part of the Moscow-led Warsaw Pact during the Cold War.

U.S. Ambassador to Sofia James Warlick told a public event on Friday that Washington had already discussed the issue unofficially with Bulgaria, Focus news agency reported.

Warlick said initial talks were also held with other countries in the region and he hoped for a positive outcome from the expected negotiations with Bulgaria's center-right government. He did not give other details.

**The new government, elected last July, is eager to prove its loyalty to its Western partners and improve Bulgaria's image, tarnished by the previous administration's failure to tame rampant corruption and crime.**

Last month, Sofia approved a request from Washington to accept a detainee being released from the U.S. prison camp at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, and decided to send 100 more soldiers to bolster its 500-strong contingent in Afghanistan this year.