

STATEMENT

FROM THE EUROPEAN MOVEMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA ON THE OCCASION OF THE BULGARIAN VETO FOR THE LAUNCH OF EU MEMBERSHIP NEGOTIATIONS

Built on the ruins of the Second World War and nurtured by the ideas of freedom, democracy, peace and prosperity of European nations, the European Union has become a unique model of unity with lasting historical value. Any exercise of revising history will make sense if the motive is to remind ourselves of the paths that lead to freedom, of the true human values that encourage solidarity and support in difficult times. In any other circumstances, revising and rewriting history would have destructive effects, not only for the direct participants, but also for the wider community.

In this context, we would like to underline that the Macedonian people, while opposing the occupying forces and fighting for their national freedom and statehood were accepted and recognised as part of the anti-fascist coalition gaining full cultural, linguistic and political independence within SFR Yugoslavia. Today, for anyone who declares themselves a democrat, the "innovating" of history, simply must not be acceptable, especially when the retailing of history has cultural, linguistic and even territorial claims as indicated by the requirements of the current Bulgarian policy regarding the Republic of North Macedonia.

At the core of the European Union's survival are the fundamental rights of its citizens, including the protection of minority rights. European countries, especially those that have adopted the Framework Convention for the Protection of Minorities (entered into force in 1998), are under constant monitoring for consistency in fulfilling their obligations under the Convention. The relevant authorities of the European Union have concluded that Bulgaria has not fulfilled its obligations. This is particularly the case with rights of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria. Furthermore, there have been numerous judgements by the European Court of Human Rights underlining Bulgaria's violations of the rights of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria.

A decade after the Second World War, Macedonians living in Bulgaria had an opportunity to self-identify as Macedonians, while the Macedonian language was accepted and practiced in schools, as well as culturally. According to the Macedonian Constitution, the country considers questions of minority rights to be an internal issue for the sovereign state, in this case the Republic of Bulgaria. However, without exception, countries are obliged to exercise their right to self-identification and provide rights and protection to minorities in accordance with international norms and obligations. In Bulgaria, these issues are undergoing a metamorphosis - from recognition to complete denial as it is at this crucial moment related to the European future of the Macedonian state.

Seventy years of a Macedonian state, with education in Macedonian language at all levels, science, art and literature, were an upgrade from the tradition that was passed down

from generation to generation of Macedonians who all those years lived without a state. The canons of denying the Macedonian national identity and its features in the modern period - previously formulated at the end of the 19th century, and rekindled by Todor Zhivkov (long-time communist ruler), cannot and must not be acceptable today. Otherwise, the disturbing spirit in the Balkans will prevail, disrupting its stability.

The Macedonian national identity and language, as an inviolable national feature, has been verified by the scientific community and the international community for a long time. In the spirit of European values, the Republic of North Macedonia has been and remains committed to deepening good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation. A notable step towards overcoming the legacy of the past and building a better future is the recent successful Conference within the Berlin Process, organised for the first time by Bulgaria, an EU member state, and North Macedonia, a country that should become an EU member. The end result of what is extremely important for the region - the Berlin Process remains vague - the veto is not an expression of support for the enlargement process.

Macedonian citizens, regardless of the political option they support, regardless of ethnicity, gender or age, have been dreaming of the "European dream" for decades, and this dream must not become a "European nightmare". Polls show that 80% of citizens would still answer - "YES" if a referendum on joining the Union is held tomorrow. Conditions that call into question national identity, language and history lead to the erosion of citizens' trust in European fundamental values and commitments.

We in the European Movement in the Republic of North Macedonia are firmly convinced that the current political discourse in this part of the Balkans will be overcome before they become a practice in the Region. In our many forms of cooperation with our Bulgarian colleagues, we have repeatedly stated together: "There is a lot of history in the Balkans." Thus, instead of rewriting history, we should work to build a better future together in the spirit of togetherness, solidarity and respect. Respect and legitimacy are not extorted; it is the satisfaction that the other expresses.

We sincerely believe that the European Union in the spirit of its values will respect its decisions written in the progress reports of Republic of North Macedonia, especially the one of March 26, 2020 for the start of the accession negotiations, a decision which we are more than confident will encourage Macedonian citizens to be stronger in their demands for more rigorous reforms in the judicial system, in reducing corruption and the overall democratisation of society.

Skopje,

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