



## **THE EUROPEAN MOVEMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA'S STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE BULGARIAN VETO FOR THE LAUNCH OF THE 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 a great destructive effect, not only for the direct participants, but also for the wider environment. In this context, we would like to point out that the Macedonian people, opposing the occupying forces and fighting for their national freedom and statehood, were accepted and recognized as part of the anti-fascist coalition gaining full cultural, linguistic and political independence within SFR Yugoslavia. For anyone today who declares himself a democrat, it should not be acceptable to "innovate" history, especially when the rewriting 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, 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 judgments by the European Court of Human Rights underlining Bulgaria's violations of the rights of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria. According to its own Constitution, the Republic of North Macedonia considers and respects this issue as an internal issue. However, countries without exception are obliged to exercise their right to self-identification and protection of minorities in accordance with the undertaken international 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.

The Macedonian national identity and language, as an inviolable national feature, has been verified by the academic community and the international community for a long time. While in Bulgaria, the question of minority rights of the Macedonian minority has had a shift from recognition to denial. Ten years after the Second World War, there was an opportunity for self-identification of Macedonians living in Bulgaria. The Macedonian language was accepted and practiced in schools, as well as culturally, which is expressed by the existence of the theater in



Macedonian language. Seventy years of Macedonian statehood, education in Macedonian language at all levels, cultural creation, literature, science, art were an upgrade from the tradition that was passed down from generation to generation of Macedonians without a state.

The agreement on friendship, good neighborliness and cooperation between the two countries, from 2017 was an encouraging step, a turn towards common values, towards what can unite us now and in the future, instead of the ghosts of the past which divide us. In the agreement, both sides pledged to help develop regional cooperation, to strengthen understanding, peace and stability through the implementation of bilateral and regional projects, as part of the process of creating a single Europe. A notable step towards overcoming the legacy of the past and building a better future is the recent successful Conference within the Berlin Process, organized for the first time by Bulgaria, an EU member state. 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 democratization of society.