

**CABINET OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH  
MACEDONIA**



Address of the President of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, Mr. Talat Xhaferi at the Conference on “Inter-Parliamentary Dialogue to Further Promote the European Integration of the Western Balkans “

20 October 2023, Skopje

Distinguished President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Mr. Kox,

Distinguished Vice President of the Government, Mr. Maricic,

Distinguished Members of Parliament,

Esteemed participants,

It is my particular honour and pleasure, on behalf of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia and on my behalf to welcome you to this Conference on the promotion of the European perspective of the Western Balkans, jointly organized with our partner, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe was the organization through which, our European and Euro – Atlantic integration started and whose expertise assisted us in our work in achieving the European standards in the area of rule of law, democracy and human rights.

The conclusion of the first European Union - Western Balkans summit, held 20 years ago in Thessaloniki was that all Western Balkan states shall become an integral part of the European Union once the established Copenhagen Criteria are achieved.

Since then, we have faced numerous challenges, but we have also reached many peaks. We had to make difficult decisions, convinced that we are making the right choice for the future of the state. The Prespa Agreement of 2018 was one of those decisions which removed the obstacle to our Euro-Atlantic integration, resulting with

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our full-fledged membership in NATO as its 30<sup>th</sup> member, in March 2020. The Republic of North Macedonia is part of the security shield of the most powerful alliance and a factor for stability of the region.

As a state we remain committed to the further implementation of the 2017 Agreement on friendship, good-neighbourliness and cooperation with Bulgaria and we expect sincere will from both sides in approaching and building confidence in the resolution of the bilateral affairs.

Now, after waiting for 17 years, we are entering the final phase of the accession. We have started the screening with the European Union, we are now in the advanced stage, and all Reports so far are positive.

We have one more challenge to overcome - the amendments of the Constitution so that we continue the negotiations by Clusters, which we believe will impose accelerated dynamics in the reform process. I believe that now is the right time for all political parties that stand for European integration in their programmes to demonstrate their commitment in action.

Dear participants,

The Assembly is the crucial institution for democratization of the society and all activities contain within the parliamentary dimension. This dimension reflects the will of the citizens, scrutinizes and controls the executive branch both internally and externally. We are dedicated to the harmonization with the Acquis Communautaire in the area of human rights, democracy and rule of law, to fulfill citizens' aspirations for integration in the European Union. In this endeavour, the Council of Europe is our valuable partner and strong support.

In parallel with the fulfillment of the European agenda, as a state we strive to remain a positive example for goodneighbourly relations by creating long-lasting partnerships. The goodneighbourly relations and the active role in regional cooperation are our longstanding strategic determination, confirmed thereof by our commitment to

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promote mutual cooperation and resolve open issues with neighbours through dialogue, understanding and compromise.

The Republic of North Macedonia as the Chairperson and voice of OSCE, contributes to the resolution of the disputes of global interest in these turbulent times. I believe that you shall agree that the geopolitical shifts on the European continent confirmed that the enlargement policy remains the best tool for peace, safety, stability and prosperity. Hence, I appeal to the European Union and its member states to continue their proactive and decisive support for the integration of the Western Balkan states. Considering the progress made in the implementation of key reforms, we need a regular, mutual dialogue with the Union and a clear timeframe for the membership in recognition of the achieved results. I consider that further postponing the accession process could call into question the reputation of the Union as a reliable partner, including its geopolitical role. This leaves room for nationalist and retrograde processes, encouraging third parties to strengthen their interest in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We welcome the granting of candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova and we believe that the clear European perspective of the Western Balkans states is of great interest to the Union from a political, security and economic standpoint. Common challenges such as hybrid and security threats and climate change must be tackled together in order to build more resilient societies in this context. That is why it is important for us that, despite the complex circumstances, the determination to continue with enlargement as a unifying project in the European Union, based on authentic European values, dominates. I want to welcome the efforts and the call of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in the framework of the strategic partnership with the European Union, to strengthen mutual political dialogue to accelerate the European integration process of the Western Balkans states.

Thank you!