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ACTION FOR Europe

AS PART OF THE PROJECT:

- more than **2500** citizens participated on **25** public debates and information sessions organized in **14** cities country-wide. In addition to Skopje, the project also targeted the following cities: *Bitola, Veles, Gevgelija, Debar, Delcevo, Kicevo, Kratovo, Negotino, Prilep, Resen, Struga, Strumica and Stip*;
- more than **2000** high-school students from **30** cities benefited from 56 one-day training on the European Union, the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance and the Community Programs;
- following were the project's local partners: *Local Community Development Foundation – Stip; Local Development and Democracy Foundation „Fokus“ - Veles; Support and Development Center – Prilep; Community Development Center – Kicevo; Regional Advocacy Center – Delevo; Sustainable Development Center „Porta“ - Strumica; Community Support Center – Resen; Sustainable Community Development Center – Debar; Local Development Center „Antigonea“ - Negotino; Regional Sustainable Development Center – Kratovo; Aqua – Struga; Regional Sustainable Development Center – Gevgelija and the Youth Cultural Center – Bitola*;
- the Mission of the European Union, as well as the Embassies of the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Hungary, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia* participated in the project. All missions were represented on the level of ambassadors, deputy ambassadors or charge d'affairs;
- representatives of think-tank organizations from most EU Member States participated, those being: *the Institute for European Policy – EUROPEUM; the Institut für Europäische Politik from Berlin; the Irish Institute for International and European Affairs; the Greek Center for European Studies and Research; the Royal Institute for International Studies – ELCANO from Madrid; the Institute of World Economics of the HAS; T.M.C. Asser Instituut from the Hague; The European Institute in Lodz; the Portuguese Institute for International Relations; the European Institute of Romania; the Center for International Relations from Ljubljana; and the Slovak Foreign Policy Association*;
- 8** publications were prepared and printed (in Macedonian and Albanian language), with contents relevant to the accession of Macedonia in the EU and with circulation of **4200** copies each.



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FOREWARD

*Macedonian Centre for European Training
Foundation Open Society Institute - Macedonia*

"Action for Europe"

This publication is the result of the last cycle of public debates organized under the motto "MK@EU", as part of the "Action for Europe" project implemented by the Macedonian Centre for European Training in cooperation with the Foundation Open Society Institute - Macedonia, the Youth Educational Forum, the Youth Cultural Centre from Bitola and NGO Support Centres from several cities throughout the country.

Project's conceptualization started by raising the question "Where we want to be in the future?", and the answer was identified in the enormous, almost hundred percent, support for Republic of Macedonia's accession in the European Union. The reasons behind such high support are more than obvious. The first being that it is completely impossible to survive in the world of today, outside the structures of the European Union. The second reads that the European Union is the most modern project and we modernize ourselves in order to become members. The third reason speaks about the fact that Macedonia geographically belongs to Europe and belongs in the European Union. Fourth and last reason is the fact that Europe's unity would be incomplete without the full integration of the Western Balkans. The last reason is actually the main message that we - the citizens - can send to the Union: Western Balkan Accession must remain an EU priority.

Attempting to support the objective of bringing the European Union closer to citizens, we decided to do it by means of explaining the Union's Enlargement Policy and the accession process, as well as to present Member-States' experiences. Therefore, the first principle of enlargement: strict but fair. In essence, this principle means that the common policy is policy on the strategic approach to matters in question, but is based on real and objective criteria, whereas states in the process must embrace a process of comprehensive reforms. Even without the perspective for European Union accession, reforms are vital for the country's development and the prosperity of the citizens, while depending on their thoroughness, as in many cases before, the Republic of Macedonia will see its rebirth as a state.

Having in mind the scope of the process, the length and importance of societal and economic development, EU Accession should be priority number one, whereas in the light of accession facilitation we must utilize three-fold partnerships: domestic, regional and international.

Dialogue with civil society is a strategic internal partnership, and the existence of an open discussion forum is far more important for the process than for the Government. Thus, in order to achieve the first partnership - domestic partnership, the Republic of Macedonia needs citizens and media that are critical and civil society to be interested and engaged. By setting its vital interests, the Republic of Macedonia will identify its strategic partners and hence achieve or forge regional and international partnerships.

*Reforms and their successful implementation require the capacity and continuity of the public administration, as EU negotiations are about the *acquis*, but also about money and politics.*

„Action for Europe“ would not have been what it is without the participation of our partners, Ambassadors of EU Member-States in the Republic of Macedonia, who speak about forging the friendship between our countries and people, as well as the experts from several European think-tank organizations who share their experiences as regards their country's accession, the enlargement policy, etc. They answer crucial questions. There are many misconceptions about the European Union and most of the fears are nothing more than prejudices. They explain how a wise political party puts aside the excess of political talk for the benefit of its country. They help us understand that by sharing sovereignty to a limited extent, you gain real sovereignty, i.e., that in the EU nothing will be decided for us without us. They tell us how they reconciled with their neighbors without losing their identity. Simply, they help us understand that if Macedonia is the problem, then Europe is the solution.

It is time to think about the future!

*Macedonian Centre for European Training
Foundation Open Society Institute - Macedonia*

“Where do you want to be in the future – That is your starting point”

INSTITUT FÜR
EUROPÄISCHE POLITIK

Katrin Böttger Ph.D,
Researcher



I would like to speak a little bit about our experience with regard to the Enlargement Policy in general. First of all, I think it is important to always keep in mind the position that you are in, when looking at the EU. I come from a Founding Member of the EU, which is also the biggest Member State with a central position in Europe. Therefore, it has a different position than the one Macedonia will have in the future. One similarity is that we have many neighbors and our relations with them were not always so good, but have improved with time thanks to the EU. Here are some examples to present all this: the so-called forgotten enlargement of 1990; Eastern enlargement and Western Balkan enlargement; and the issue of cross-border cooperation between the German and Danish or Polish minorities.

First of all, the so-called forgotten enlargement of 1990, which was the reunification of Germany, was very small for the EU, but it was rather important for Germany. It was done in a relatively unusual way because by becoming member of the former Western Germany that then Eastern Germany entered the EU. The positions of the EU Member States were not always so positive; there were also some fears because Germany was to become the biggest country and possibly a dominant one. At the end reunification was granted by the former allies from the Second World

War and Eastern Germany was integrated into the European Community without formal accession process. There were hopes that the living standards in Eastern Germany would very fast reach the level of Western Germany, which has not proven true. However, the EU Membership brought considerable economic benefits to former Eastern Germany. Another important consequence of the “forgotten enlargement” was the change of the borders of the country, which eventually led the way to the next wave of enlargement - the Eastern enlargement.

The accession of our neighbours Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia was very important for the German Government and very much at the heart of the Germans. This gave us the opportunity to closely cooperate with our neighbours and thus gradually overcome the old feuds that we had. Due to the importance that the accession of these countries had for Germany, the media covered it extensively and young Germans had the opportunity to see how long and difficult this process is. I remember a Polish diplomat saying that whenever they asked the EU - “When are we actually going to join?” the EU said - “In two years!”. Two years later, asking the same question, the answer was again - “In two years!”. At the end, the diplomat rephrased the question: “When are these two years ever going to pass?” Eventually it



happened; through a difficult process that took quite a long time, Poland joined the EU. It should not be forgotten that enlargement is a two way process. It is not only the accession countries that have to do their homework, as we like to say, but it is also the EU that has to do its homework. Our current homework is the completion of the ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty. There are only three Member States left to ratify the Treaty. If the Treaty is ratified by these countries EU will fulfill its own benchmark for future accession processes. If we need to evaluate the position of the public opinion in Germany on enlargement, one must say it was not so enthusiastic. On some occasions negative opinion was voiced. In Germany some fears were expressed concerning our labor market as well. There was an impression that lots of people might be coming to work and thus distort the market. Nevertheless, the people that went to work in Britain for example actually improved the economic situation both in the host and home coun-

tries, and it added to the diversity. Today, some 5 years after enlargement took place, the experience shows that people got use to it quite quickly.

I would like to turn to Germany's position on the Western Balkans' enlargement. It is important to see that there are many problems that you are discussing now about the membership and about how it will work for your country. That has also been important for us in the starting years. Germany has not always been a member of a peaceful united Europe. In historic terms if we look at the relationship between Germany and France they were very hostile until the end of the Second World War. During many centuries there were fights against each other and prejudices prevailed. Today young people that just finished high school do not even remember that there was such hostility between the two nations. Nowadays, with the borders being open, there is so much exchange going on. The people also learn each other's languages, so there is a lot more acceptance among them.



Of course we still fight when we play football, but we do not fight usually while doing normal politics and I think that is an important achievement.

Western Balkan enlargement will be considerably longer than Eastern enlargement due to several reasons. Drawing from the experience of the Eastern Enlargement certain processes were less sustainable and certain reforms were simply decided in the Parliament, and not properly implemented. Finally, the reform process does not include to a sufficient level the public and civil society and that leads to negative perception of EU reforms and accession. This is something that German politicians are concerned about, that reforms are only superficial.

Another point that I find important is the aspect of cross-border cooperation. Unlike the Eastern enlargement for the Western Balkans enlargement the EU sees it as very important that the relationships among the individual countries are good. And regional cooperation is not an easy issue. But if you look

at the way the cross-border cooperation developed for example between Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland, in the beginning it was also very difficult. There were hardly any translators that could translate during the meetings, so how do you talk to each other if you do not speak each other's language? The lack of language proficiency was however the least of our problems. There were a lot of historical problems, because during the Second World War the Germans invaded Poland. After the war, Poland expelled a lot of Germans. These actions brought a lot of hostility between the two countries. There were widespread fears among Polish people even after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Since borders were no longer closed and people could travel freely, the Polish were afraid that Germans would want their houses back. It took a long time and effort to realize that someone just wants to see the house where he was born and the place where he grew up. That does not necessarily mean that he wants to move back there

or that he wants to take back what would have belonged to him at one point in history. There is also the perception of Germans being always punctual and precise. These prejudices often lead to problems in our communication to Poland. In our first interaction with the Polish local government everybody was hesitant to decide on the issues that mattered. When the Germans proposed the manner of discussion and the decision-making, the Polish usually said that the Germans are dictating the work, but when

the Germans were standing aside the Polish would say - you have to take part in deciding. One has to acknowledge the history. It is always there and it has shaped the way one thinks. If you try to interact with someone else, it is never going to be perfect; it won't even be easy since history is always there. The main thing you need to decide is what you want to do, and where you want to be in the future. This is your starting point!



“It is completely impossible to survive in the world of today, outside of the structures of the European Union”

EMBASSY OF THE KINGDOM
OF THE NETHERLANDS

H.E. Ms. Simone Filippini,
Ambassador



To talk about Europeans as "them" and about Macedonians as "you" or to talk about Europe as if Macedonia is not part of it is not the right thing to do. You live in a beautiful country. You are a very important part of this region and you are an integral part of Europe. You are part of us and you are our natural partner. That is how I see Macedonia. You are our partners - for now and for the future. Over the years we will become even closer partners, as you gradually progress towards EU Membership.

The short films presented earlier were very informative. The last ones were funny and maybe a little politically incorrect. To point out at Bulgaria and Italy as being somewhat chaotic countries, not applying all the rules, is politically incorrect, but it speaks of the diversity in Europe. This diversity is a very crucial part of who we are. We are not all standing neatly straight in the queue. We are not doing all the things exactly how they should be done. Rules, regulations and laws are there to be respected, but we are all human beings. What all Dutch people like about Macedonia is that not everybody is queued one after the other. Everyone orders his or her coffee, screams about the different coffees that you have, although all coffees are same be it "big macchiato", "small macchiato", "Macedonian coffee", "Debar coffee" etc. That is nice and European.

Your diversity is not negative. You have to cherish your diversity and have it become an asset. You do not realize this enough. The fact that you have many people living in this country, who have always been there and that will always be there: Macedonians, Albanians, Vlach, Serbs, Bosniaks, foreigners like me -that adds to the quality of who you are. Instead of looking for things that divide you, with the same energy look for things that unite you. You are much more alike than you think you are.

History is a difficult issue, especially because there are different views on it. In the Netherlands we considered ourselves heroes after the Second World War. We fought the people who wanted independence from the Netherlands at that time. We had a colony of our country, far away in Asia, and we thought those people were not ready for independence. So, we fought their will to become independent. In the end they became independent. How can we prevent a whole nation from becoming independent if it wants to? Just as you wanted your independence 18 years ago, and you became independent. The Dutch were not really nice people at the time when we fought the Indonesians. We did horrible things. And we needed 50 years to publicly acknowledge this. We had to digest our own past. This is also what people here in this part of Europe need to do - digest their own past. And that costs time, it costs



energy, it hurts, but you have to go through it, you have to reconcile with each other. That is the only way forward to the European Union.

All the people of the European Union, those 500 million EU citizens, and those that want to become EU citizens, have to find a common future. We are different, it is true, but in many aspects we are similar, we are all human beings. If we have the will to look each other in the eyes, to be honest with one another, to uphold our personal integrity, to respect each other's differences of opinion, of cultural background, of religion, of language, of any other issue that plays an important role also in this country - I think we will make it together. If we start stressing all those issues that divide us, we will all lose. The 1990s wars on the Balkan only produced losers. It is by stretching out our hands toward each other that we can turn this process around.

Europe is a very complex project with lots of common policies, 27 Member States, with Croatia knocking on the door, Macedonia knocking on the door, and Turkey, a huge country, also knocking on the door. There are also Iceland, Albania and many others that want to join. We sometimes underestimate how complex this is, even for us, the EU citizens. Everything

is being organized somewhere in Brussels, in meeting rooms, by politicians who make deals with one another, deals that are difficult to understand - what is the outcome of this? What we need to understand is that Europe is a big machinery of compromise - going forward with, at present, 27 Member States, with their national interests and perceived national interests is really difficult.

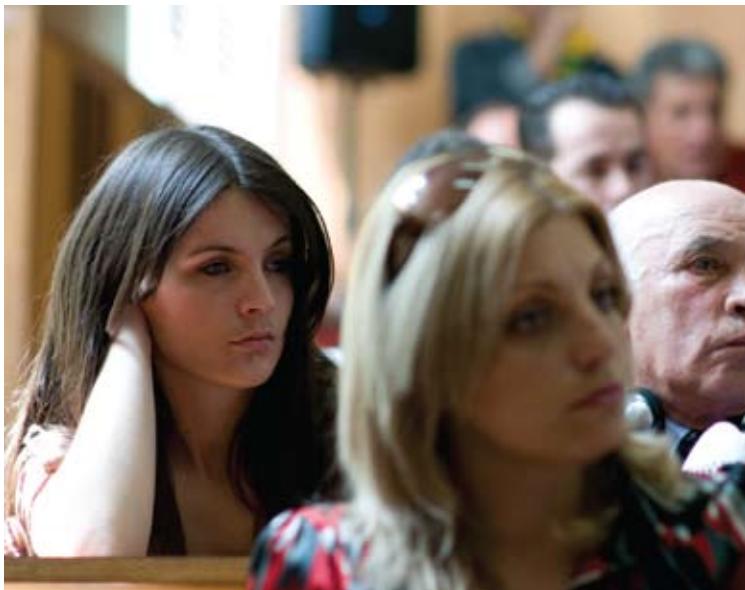
Europe is very much alive here in Macedonia, much more than in the Netherlands and in a more positive manner. The Netherlands has taken Europe for granted. As you all know, we were one of the founding countries. We take Europe for granted and we criticize all day. We say Europe has done this, or Europe has done that, but we never realize that in the end Europe is a project of citizens. We all have to be really assertive in this whole big project. If politicians in the Netherlands saw how much attention is paid to the European project here in Macedonia, they would be jealous. It is on the news every day, difficult to understand for us normal citizens, but very visible. Speaking about the EU, discussing all the steps in the process of your accession will bring Macedonia huge benefits. The European Union is of crucial national interest for your country, as it is for us - the Dutch. We are a small country, and

it is completely impossible to survive in the world of today as a separate country, outside the structures of the European Union that protect and help you, both in economic and in political terms.

Consumers' rights, as you know, are of enormous importance. Consumers have gained huge influence because of the European Union. We eat safe food every day. We have fantastic insurance systems when we travel. I have seen the borders between Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, and the Dutch queuing in front of them. Horrible! One could not pass! Now the borders are open, everybody is travelling freely from one place to another, getting to know one another. People are getting together, having contacts, developing economic bonds, trading, and making investments. Institutions are working together, cultural institutions, but also think-thanks. All kinds of institutions come together, exchange their thoughts, knowledge, expertise and experience. This brings so many benefits to all of us - we learn from each other. Europe is not a one-way street. We enrich each other. It is a unique situation - never in the history has something taken place like the European project.

The Netherlands has always supported Macedonia, maybe because we feel close to you as you are also a small country in this sea of big countries in the EU. We also had to struggle to be successful, but we are a successful country and we know our strategic interest and we understand your strategic interest. We have provided Macedonia with political support, development cooperation and cultural support. Our Queen, when she still was a Princess, expressed her personal support to Macedonia after the terrible earthquake in 1963. For the Netherlands, supporting Macedonia is a matter of consistency. We will keep on doing this during your accession process. There is only one small thing: Macedonia has to do its homework - that is what accession is all about. European Union is kind of a club, if you want to become a member of this club you have to abide to its rules. There is nothing unfair in you doing this, because we all had to do it. This is part of the process of the Union, and will go on forever, also with new fields coming out continuously.

You are now approaching the phase of accession negotiations. Although I believe "negotiations" is a



bit of a strange word in this context as it is more an ongoing dialogue between a country and the European Commission and the Member States about how far you are in approaching all rules and regulations that you need to apply. This is all for you to be able to be competitive within the European Union. There is no example of a country not succeeding in this, and it is my belief that you will be able to do this as well. Of course, there will be obstacles on the way, there is one even now. This obstacle has to be solved. Keep in mind that you should not be guided off-road. You have to keep on track, and prepare yourself to pass on the speed track towards EU Membership.

It is really important for the country to work hard to accede to the EU, to soothe its citizens by doing so, to educate them to take their rights and support the process. There are a lot more benefits for everybody in the European Union. We know this. We have seen this. All the Member States want to support you in the process, even the United States supports your process of EU accession, because we have all seen that it is important for Europe to be united and to work together. Let us go on this way, the way forward to the European Union looking for similarities and not for dividing issues.



“European Union is the most modern project and we modernize ourselves to become members”

EMBASSY OF THE
REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

Angel Angelov,
Chargée d’Affaires a.i.



It has been widely acknowledged that the European Union is the most modern project. As such, it is also the most complex one because the EU synchronizes the interests of the 27 states. Therefore, the European Union functions according to two systems - the European Commission, which is the bureaucracy of the European Union, and the Member States. When we say Brussels, it refers to the bureaucracy on one side and the Member States on the other. Within the European Union there are many institutions on different levels, hence the need for translation of complex mechanisms so they can be understood by ordinary citizens. First, a new term emerged in the theory - the so-called ‘soft power’ and it is entirely related to the European Union; the Union is the soft power. If throughout the history of mankind solutions to problems were sought by use of force and alliances based on military and political grounds - from Alexander the Great to NATO - today the European Union represents an alliance based on values and pragmatic interests. How is this soft power perceived from the outside? On one hand, some say that the European Union is a force, but not in the full meaning thereof as it makes general decisions in foreign policy with difficulty. On the other hand, it is the strongest gravitation center or a magnet attracting the states outside the club. They all want to join. Therefore, it is not the European

Union who wants to integrate Bulgaria and Macedonia, but Bulgaria and Macedonia want to join it. This is very important to have in mind. European Union is the most modern project and we modernize ourselves in order to become members. This modernization includes all aspects of life - from agriculture to culture, from education to judiciary, from fight against corruption and organized crime to new social policy models.

One of the basic terms in the European Union applied to all policies is the principle of subsidiarity. Subsidiarity is the basic political doctrine, according to which solutions should be found on the most decentralized level, as closely as possible to citizens, whereas the central government only observes and gets involved when solutions are inefficiently implemented. This means that the European Union functions from the bottom up, and not the other way around. Decisions are made on the lowest level and if they are not in compliance with the law, the central government gets involved. This is hard to be understood by our societies which in the 20th century were faced with different stages of totalitarianism, autocracy and like. Both, societal habits and behavior have changed. We believe that somewhere up is the leader, the power or the “big brother” who takes care of us, allowing us one thing and forbidding another. The modern European project is the opposite. One takes care of him/herself.

For example, that is the philosophy behind the entire decentralization process of the municipalities in Macedonia. The municipalities should assume the responsibility for spending the money at their disposal for the benefit of citizens. However, this is just one example. Of course, problems can occur, as some municipalities are richer than others. This is where the second basic principle of the European Union comes into play - solidarity. The Union shows mutual assistance, the stronger help the weaker, as well anyone in need. Thus, the central government helps the poor municipality, but when everything functions well, there is no need for the Government to get involved.

In fact, if subsidiarity is vertical, solidarity is horizontal. The European Union functions as a system of vertical and horizontal relations. Why is this so? Because, according to the Lisbon Strategy, the European Union's goal is to become the most dynamic and competitive economy worldwide. How will this be achieved? The Lisbon Strategy is comprised of three pillars. First a knowledge-based economy which means an economy that is functional due to the existence of trained staff and state-of-art technologies. Second, the new social policy: taking care of people, their professional development and unemployment, while the third pillar - environment - means protecting the environment, flora and fauna around us, as technology must not destroy the nature.

Here I will talk about the basics - education. Your Government has a program "Knowledge is power". Not only is it true as a framework and policy, but also it is a universal truth for all states. Without sufficient staff there would not be sufficiently good administrative capacity, i.e., there would not be people who would know how to apply and benefit from the funds. In order to develop the capacity of the staff, they should be

permanently present in the administration and learn, as they need more time and practical experience. In reality, when elections take place and the new Government takes the office, the entire staff employed is discharged. Let me tell you an anecdote, which was actually a true story. After the elections, one Mayor discharged all civil servants from the municipal administration and Ambassador Fouere asked him why he did that, given the fact that they were trained. The mayor responded: "Well, everyone else does it." However, such practices will do no good. That is why the central topic discussed is the Law on Civil Servants. It is necessary for the administration to be independent and well trained to use the funds, and not discharged with every change of the government.

Let us go back to education for a while. I would like to share with you our experience as regards the introduction of dispersed studies by opening faculties in different towns. Bulgaria did this in the 90s of the last century and the result was not good. This was mostly due to the fact that diplomas awarded to students were of no worth. They faced problems with accreditation, legalization, etc. Of course, the decision is yours, we can only share our negative experience. Bulgaria also faced problems, although not major, in regard to the administrative capacity for using the funds and it took us 2 years after becoming a member to adjust to EU requirements. Finances from the funds are very important, because with them we modernize all spheres in the societal and economic systems of the state. In order to know how to become eligible for European funding, one must know how to write projects, how to apply, how to read the translation into different languages, meaning that in order to obtain funding one should continuously learn and upgrade.

In 1997, IPA was introduced, the Instrument for



Pre-Accession Assistance. According to the last report, which includes an overview of the Stabilization and Association Agreement for the period 2008-2010, as part of IPA Macedonia was granted 244 million MKD, or around 16 million EUR, for a period of 2 years. IPA also includes the Cross-Border Cooperation Program, which has a budget of approximately 7,800,000 EUR from the European Regional Development Fund, from the budget of Bulgaria and Macedonia. The program targets 23 Bulgarian municipalities from the region of Blagoevgrad and Kustendil and 29 border regions from Macedonia, including Kratovo. Results are expected in three basic areas, one of which is economic development and social bonding. This means that the focus is on business and social policy development, as well as addressing unemployment and training people who need new jobs. The second area is improving the quality of life. Emphasis is put on protection and management of natural

and cultural resources, and your regions are abundant in them. Technical assistance on project development is also included, and what is very important: learning how to apply for funding. Municipalities, non-governmental sector, central administration's regional offices and national parks' administration offices in the region are only a few of those who can apply for funding. Companies and political parties are not eligible for applying, which is good, as otherwise corruption would be spread. The Association of Local Self-Government Units shows great interest as well, and in its Strategic Plan 2006-2011 anticipated training on European funds for the municipalities in order to obtain more information. If we are to present IPA funds in this way, then for the Republic of Macedonia IPA funds' absorption is Macedonia's virtual participation in the European Union. Or better yet, IPA is a simulation game, but with real money. Therefore you should make efforts to earn it.



“Macedonia belongs in the European Union”

PORTUGUESE INSTITUTE FOR
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Sónia Rodrigues,
Researcher



The individual experiences from the accession process to full European membership are one of the particularities which enriches the European diversity.

As regards the Portuguese steps towards the European Union, we have to look to last century's history. Between 1933 and 1974, Portugal lived under a right wing dictatorship, isolated from the European mainstream politics, which ended with a bloodless military-led left wing revolution in April 25th 1974. Portugal initiated the European accession process in 1977 and joined the European Economic Community in 1986, along with Spain. In 1999, Portugal was one of the founding countries of the Euro. Since the beginning of this process we have achieved great economic

benefits and established a political forum for discussing national and international issues.

Even at a first glance you can see the same is relevant here in the Western Balkans. There is a great diversity in ethnicity, religion, culture, which forges a common history. Having in mind the Iberian example and looking upon that history and the centuries together with your neighbours, you should embrace the diversity that connects you.

In the Macedonian case, as we could see in the outcome of the 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit, the name issue is a determinant one. There is an urgent need for reconciliation and regular meetings between Skopje and Athens. It would be helpful if the European Union could put a bit of pressure on both sides to boost their creativeness and see them reach a solution.





In what concerns the western Balkans European integration, it's my personal view that the countries that followed the fall of Yugoslavia are the «lucky ones» in terms of European membership, because they belong to Europe and they are all essential to European peace, stability and cultural heritage. It is good to have doubts about the European projects

and raise questions on different aspects of your Accession Process. Only by doing this you'll achieve political dialogue, free media and freedom of expression, which are the foundational and primary values in the construction of a common future in Europe. This is part of the great and hard work that all have to do in order to join the European Union.

"Europe's unity would be incomplete without the full integration of Western Balkans"

EMBASSY OF THE
CZECH REPUBLIC

Vaclav Mleziva,
Deputy Chief of Mission



In the introduction I would like to briefly address the Czech Presidency of the European Union which took place in the first six months of this year. I will also shortly address our bilateral relations and their further deepening. The symbolic motto of the Czech Presidency was „Europe without Barriers“ - Europe without internal cultural and economic barriers for the citizens, entrepreneurs and businesses. The key topics of the Czech Presidency were the economy, energy and the European Union's role in the world. If we take into account the complexness of the situation at the beginning of the Czech EU Presidency, it can be stated that the Presidency Agenda was fully achieved.

One of the most specific results was the acceleration of the visa liberalization process, a process which, among others, was initiated by the Czech Republic. We are convinced that the visa liberalization is a component of the EU integration process of the Republic of Macedonia and of the other countries in the region. As regards the visa liberalization process, we quite positively assess the fact that Macedonia is the leader in the region in terms of fulfilling the conditions thereof. During the Czech Presidency a series of cultural and economic events took place in your beautiful country. As an example, I would like to mention the Ministerial Conference held in Mavrovo, in the period 27-29 May

and dedicated to the environmental protection issues. At the Macedonian Chamber of Commerce and as part of the Czech Days in Macedonia, we organized a business forum with 43 representatives from Czech and Macedonian companies, which was accompanied with a cultural presentation of the Czech Republic in Skopje. During the Czech Presidency, we also organized several concerts, exhibitions and displays of Czech-Finnish creations. All these events were organized with the aim to bring the Czech Republic closer to the Macedonian public and to deepen our contacts on all levels.

Now allow me to briefly address the Czech-Macedonian relations. Czech Republic and Macedonia traditionally have excellent bilateral relations, unburdened with any open issues. However, the high level of political relations proved with the frequent visit of Governmental delegations does not correspond with the level of economic relations between the two countries. It is exactly the economy and trading cooperation that provide the greatest potential for further development of the Czech-Macedonian relations. I would like to say that we have to learn a bit from the Slovenian companies and entrepreneurs on how to make good business with Macedonia, having into consideration its geo-political position on the cross-section of Corridors 8 and 10, and the bilateral free trade agree-

ments it has signed with the neighbouring countries from Western Balkans, which represents a perspective market for Czech companies and investors. The growing joint interest is proved with the dynamic growth in scope of the mutual trade exchanges achieved in the last 3 years. In the light of future development of bilateral economic relations a great possibility would be provided with the Czech investments and the participation of Czech companies from the field of energy, traffic infrastructure and environmental protection. The Czech Republic can offer much in these fields and the Czech companies have good references, also due to the implementation of governmental projects in the Republic of Macedonia funded with Czech aid funds.

Embassies and other state institutions and agencies can be of great assistance in developing the economic cooperation and establishing contacts, but the crucial role is located with the economic operators, both Czech and Macedonian entrepreneurs. One of the activities implemented in this regard was the informal meeting between Czech and Macedonian companies held on the 12th of October and organized by the relevant Chambers of Commerce.

I would like to stress that the Czech Republic during its EU Presidency supported and will continue to support the integration efforts of Macedonia, and its membership in the European Union and NATO. The Western Balkans and their integration in the Euro-Atlantic structures was one of the priorities of the Czech Presidency and has seen its continuation in the Swedish Presidency. Macedonia's aspirations for integration into Euro-Atlantic structures will remain a priority of the Czech for-

ign policy and will continue to receive strong support despite the political spectrum in the Czech Republic.

An expression of our active support was the official visit of the President of the Czech Government and at the same time the Chair of the European Council, Mr. Mirek Topolánek, in March and the visit of the President of the Senate of the Czech Republic, Mr. Přemysl Sobotka, in May this year. Frequent contacts are also maintained between the Parliaments of the two countries. As an example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic supported the project „Supporting Macedonia's Advancement in its European Integration Process“. Next step should be the establishment of a Parliamentary Institute in Macedonia. The recent visit of the Deputy Prime Minister of the Czech Republic and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jan Kohout, to Skopje only confirms the continuity of the Czech Presidency and our interest in the events taking place in the region. In witness thereof, the Czech Republic is ready to assist Macedonia in its accession process to the European Union and to share its accession experiences. Finally, I would like to stress that uniting and stabilizing the European continent would be incomplete without the gradual integration of the Western Balkans into the European Union. Therefore, in our opinion, it is necessary to continue this process and strengthen the European perspective of the countries in the region as part of the European Union's external relations. In that context, we expect this year's Progress Report to be positive and would like to reassure you that in our opinion Macedonia is on a good road.

"Western Balkans' Accession remains an EU priority"

EMBASSY OF THE
KINGDOM OF SPAIN

Maria Ángeles
García de Lara,
Chargée d'Affaires a.i.



Since the accession in 1986, this is going to be the 4th time that Spain will hold the EU Presidency. This will also be the first time for Spain, but also for the EU, according to the Lisbon Treaty, that the Presidency works as a team of three countries for 18 months. The next Presidential Troika, that is to say, the 3 succeeding presidencies, is going to be composed of Spain, Belgium and Hungary.

Starting with the Spanish Presidency in January 2010, until the end of the Hungarian Presidency in June 2011, the three countries will work together for 18 months establishing the priorities and setting the Agenda of the Presidency. I believe it is important for a Candidate Country such as Macedonia to know about these main lines of work of the EU. Macedonia also needs to

be aware of the internal reforms that are going on in the EU. This is going to strongly affect your accession.

First on the list of priorities on the Agenda of the Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Presidency is overcoming the present economic crisis. This implies implementation of the Lisbon Strategy with two special challenges:

- 1) to achieve sustainable economic growth; and
- 2) to increase employment through investment, research and new technologies.

Second in line is to fight Climate Change by adoption of a new Energy Action Plan for Europe in the interval 2010-2012. The basis of the Action Plan shall be set under the framework of the Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change, to be held in December this year.





Third priority shall be to enhance the area of freedom, security and justice commonly known as the Stockholm Program that is due to substitute the current Hague Program in November 2009. This initiative aims at the better harmonization of legislation and implementation of the Schengen Acquis. The European Common Policies on Asylum and Migration will be reinforced.

With regards to Foreign Policy, the Troika will pay special attention to strengthening the good neighborly relations with Mediterranean countries. The three concurring presidencies will work on the further development of the Union for the Mediterranean. Of course, the three presidencies will focus on the Enlargement Policy and the Accession of the Western Balkan countries to the EU.

Spain, Belgium and Hungary are going to work together to promote the EU as a global player. For this reason during the next three presidencies the organisation of several summits is planned: a special summit between the EU and the United States, a summit between the EU and Latin America, and also other summits with different bilateral partners.

Finally, the Troika will also coordinate its efforts for the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty that we hope will be adopted by the end of 2009.

"I am knocking on the European Union's door in order to secure a more dignified life, both for my people and myself"

FOUNDATION OPEN SOCIETY
INSTITUTE - MACEDONIA

Vladimir Milcin,
Executive Director



I long dwelled on the manner in which to address you, and finally decided to address you as "Dear Fellow-Travellers", however not in the sense of the Serbian or Macedonian word "suffer" (similar spelling with the Macedonian fellow-traveller), but in the sense of a journey. Like it or not, we are all on the same train - all of us. We - the citizens of Macedonia - sit on the train and wish and hope it will take us to Europe. Mr. Fouéré is here with us, and - like it or not - he is here to help us and from time to time push the train towards Europe. Our guest from Ireland is also here to help us push the train. I am old enough to remember the train called "Balkan Express". It was a rather unsightly train. Then, there was another, more presentable, clean and tidy train called "Orient Express". However, the latter did not arrive in Skopje as a whole train, but was divided somewhere near Nis, where one composition headed to Istanbul, and the other to Athens. Now, we all dream of a third train to be called "Europe Express". It should not be like "Balkan Express", which stopped at every third pole in the sticks. Ultimately, we would not like to be train travellers forever. The most unpleasant situation when you travelled by the night train in the former Yugoslavia was when you suddenly wake up and realize that the train is standing still on a side railtrack. Then you start wondering what is going on. Does the train have a locomotive? Similarly, last year, we at the Foundation Open Society

Institute - Macedonia were wondering the same thing - whether our train, which was standing somewhere on the twelfth railtrack at the old Skopje Railway Station, has a locomotive? Is our train actually moving, or do we still stubbornly believe in rhetoric, in the words that we all want - and we DO all want - to join Europe? However, it seems that a handful of people worked on that, whereas the locomotive was attached to the train's rear end and pulled in the opposite direction. We at the Foundation did not have a locomotive, but thought that together with those who truly wish to join Europe could try to push the locomotive and bring the train to a switch point. And then, slowly, from one switch to another, to bring the train from the twelfth railtrack to the first. I believe that now the train that we are on has great chances to start from the first railtrack. Partially this was due to the fact that unlike last year and this spring, those responsible for locomotives decided to attach the locomotive to the train and pull it. Partially this was due to the in-country pressure, as well as the pressure from outside; partially because there was no more money as these are times of economic crisis and one should succeed in something. What we can succeed in at the moment is obtaining the recommendation for opening the accession negotiations. This is very important for us - the citizens, as we believe that the moment negotiations with the European Union start, the pressure on our



politicians would become even bigger and it would be more difficult for them to overstep their powers and not fulfil the promises they made. In this case, the European Union is our ally, the citizens' ally. I do not know which politician thinks that EU is his/her ally or not, the bottom line is that I do not want to know. What I do know is that we need the European Union. When we say Action for Europe, we actually refer to Action for Macedonia. We need Europe - so that we would no longer be forwarded from one office to another, so that we would not be required a political party membership card when looking for a job, or so that elected officials would not submit their letters of resignation at the worst of times, etc. The state we live in and the rights we enjoy depend on the fact whether we are standing in Europe with one or both feet. This means that this "express" train of ours should as soon as possible reach this action's motto - mk@eu, i.e. Macedonia in the European Union. This is our goal. We thought that we were obliged to try to push the train from the sidetrack to the maintrack. Let us remind ourselves that more than 90% of citizens want to become

European citizens, they would like to see Macedonia in the European Union. Everyone is doing as much as it can and as long as everyone is doing as much as it can - we will behave as Europeans. This is my penultimate sentence, the last one would be the following: it is European to raise questions, it is not European to hide that we do not know something or be ashamed to raise a question and voice one's opinion in public.

First, the absence of Anti-Discrimination Law in the Republic of Macedonia is definitely shameful and scandalous. After many years of efforts made by the civil society sector, a draft-law was developed, but assessed as disastrous. This is yet another proof in support of my thesis that we need allies from outside if we are to make our Government take actions that would not be considered substandard from the European Union's point of view. In order to do that, we need greater civil solidarity. I agree with you completely. I know the situation, but I wonder why are you left alone? Why are only those who are victims, and mind you not all of them, but only those that are victims of political discrimination left alone, as political discrimination

occurs when someone is fired due to his/her affiliation to or sympathy for a political party. Why do such cases fail to trigger sufficiently strong reactions among citizens in the Republic of Macedonia? How come that 70% of the members from the Trade Union of Education, Science and Culture Employees cannot organize themselves and tell Mr. Dojcin Cvetanovski that he is not protecting the members thereof and that because of that they would no longer pay the membership fee or have a share of their salaries deducted for that purpose. This is the manner in which the world that is ahead of us acts when it comes to civil rights and freedoms.

As for the civil society, my message is the following: do not expect, on the contrary - ask and take! If you are not given what you have asked for, start monitoring. I agree that the Government rhetorically, and not solely rhetorically, ignored the civil society sector, with few exceptions (including governmental NGOs that emerge and also disappear over night). For example, you can monitor which non-governmental organizations, that supposedly address youth issues, received funds from the EU Program "Youth in Action". Explore which organizations benefited from these funds and whether there was conflict of inter-

est in the grant-awarding process. This is the way the civil society sector should act. Do not expect to be summoned to Skopje to take a picture with the Minister, because it may happen that you only serve as scenery. That is not an honourable role for the civil society.

If I were a demagogue, or a campaigning politician, I would say to Branko Beninov - ask for equality, insist on equality! And he would have probably voted for me. But that would have been a lie, as the thesis is juxtaposed. WE want to join the European Union. WE want to become equal members of the club. Only then would we be equal. Nobody forced us to apply for membership in the European Union. We decided to do it, because we saw that we might become isolated if we did not do that. Membership in the club - the European Union is a club with rules and benefits - is not the best thing in the Universe. However, we can only discuss the disadvantages and the not-so-nice things about the European Union only when we become EU citizens. Then, it would be very easy for us to be Euro-sceptics. For the time being, I am knocking on the European Union's door in order to secure a more dignified life, both for my people and myself.





“First principle of enlargement: Strict but fair”

T.M.C. ASSER INSTITUT

Steven Blockmans Ph.D.,
Researcher



It is a great show of European spirit of the organizers of today's events to ask a Belgian to comment on the approach of the Netherlands to EU Enlargement. We are, after all, united in diversity. The Dutch approach to EU Enlargement is very much in line with the general approach that the other 26 Member States have towards this policy. Yet, because of its specific characteristics - being a small multi-cultural Member State, a net contributor to the EU budget, with a principled stance towards the respect for rules and all-inclusive consultation in policy-making - the approach of the Netherlands shows distinctive nuances in its approach to EU Enlargement when compared to that preached by the other countries of the European Union.

The Netherlands is a small to medium-sized Member State which has clear economic, security and political interests in cooperating with other states in Europe. Combining efforts with Member States with the same mindset makes the Netherlands stronger in the face of the political, economic and financial challenges of today's globalised world. Even before the Netherlands set up, together with five other Western European countries, the original European Communities in the 1950s, it already cooperated in a political, cultural, and economic way through the Benelux with its neighbouring countries Belgium and Luxembourg. It was a founding member of NATO in order to assure its security interests. For the same reasons, the Netherlands

has been a strong supporter of the geographic widening of the European Union. In cooperating with other states, it sought to achieve its goals in trade, in political and cultural cooperation, to become stronger, more prosperous, and more stable in a changing international environment, and to translate those achievements in benefits for its citizens. In the 1990s, its successes on these fronts were hailed by US President Clinton as the 'Dutch miracle', an example to others.

In the historic spirit of the reunification of Western and Eastern Europe, the Netherlands played its role in promoting the reintegration of Europe, albeit under certain conditions in order not to lose the benefits which had been acquired over the previous 40 years of the European integration process. The countries wishing to join the European Union at the beginning of the nineties were not or were less experienced in democracy, less prosperous, and economically unstable. For these countries, the EU devised new membership conditions known as the 'Copenhagen Criteria', a development spurred by the Netherlands. The Netherlands has been a strict monitor of these requirements. The Hague is a supporter of the idea that if you want to join the club, you play by the rules of the club. The body of rules include the four Copenhagen Criteria, plus the specific requirements which deal with the violent past and specific challenges of the countries of the Western Balkans, and the benchmarks which have been adopted

in the framework of the pre-accession process. Under the motto 'strict but fair', the Netherlands has closely guarded the proper application of these conditions when monitoring reform processes in the administration, economy, and the legal order of the candidate and potential candidate countries. Quality of reforms is deemed more important than meeting deadlines.

In 1997, the Netherlands was a proponent of the idea to create a front group of six candidate countries to open accession negotiations with, while delaying that prospect for another group of six less prepared states. Ultimately, this approach resulted in the accession of 10 countries in 2004, while Bulgaria and Romania were only admitted to the EU in 2007 because of daunting problems with corruption, judicial reform, and economic stability. And still, the feeling in The Hague is that the two laggards joined the Union too soon because they did not comply with all the conditions.

The 'big bang' enlargement of the EU has been a shock for the 'old' Member States. Some of the 12 new countries proved rather slow learners in the 'European' way of compromise-making. For their part, the Dutch had to adjust to

the idea that the addition of so many new Member States made it more difficult to push through with the 'deepening' agenda of the European Union. When the Dutch were given a chance to express themselves in a referendum on the future of Europe in 2005, more specifically on the so-called 'EU Constitution', an overwhelming majority of 62% of them voted against the document. The reasons for this negative vote were explained in terms of the distance between the Dutch electorate and the decision-making machinery in 'Brussels', the role of the Netherlands in the European integration project and the future of that process, especially its seemingly perpetual expansion, in particular with Turkey.

A combination of such 'enlargement fears' and 'enlargement blues', especially the impact on the domestic labour market, the so-called "Polish plumber-syndrome", has pushed the political leadership of the country into a more conservative and stricter approach to the application of conditions for EU accession of (potential) candidate countries. This is certainly the case for the Western Balkans, especially for the countries that were involved in the wars of the first half of the 1990s where the Nether-







lands, as part of a bigger international peace-keeping endeavour, played a prominent role and paid a heavy price morally, especially for the loss of the so-called “safe haven” of Srebrenica to the Bosnian Serb army. The failure to protect thousands of Muslim men and boys from a certain death led to the resignation of the Dutch Government and nation-wide soul-searching. The trauma of Srebrenica and the fact that the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia is based in The Hague have been the two most prominent reasons for the Netherlands to be strict in applying the ‘Copenhagen-plus’ condition of full and unequivocal cooperation with the ICTY. For months, the Netherlands has defended an isolated position in the Council of the European Union by sticking to its approach that Serbia has to show full cooperation with the ICTY before it can move forward in the pre-accession process.

It should be said, though, that the Netherlands has given up some ground in order to meet Serbia’s reformist drive under the leadership of President Boris Tadic and to lessen the blow on Belgrade over the loss of Kosovo, which the Netherlands has recognised as an independent and sovereign state. At the same time, the strict monitoring of the (pre-)accession conditions goes hand-in-hand with reaching out to all of the countries concerned. By giving aid and technical assistance in order to help them in the reform processes that are needed to join the European Union, the Netherlands does not hold candidate countries hostage to its tough approach to EU Enlargement. Its policy is, indeed, ‘strict but fair’.

“EU reforms are vital for the country’s development and the prosperity of the citizens”

**MISSION OF THE
EUROPEAN UNION**

H.E. Mr. Erwan Fouéré,
Ambassador,
Head of Mission



As we have seen in many countries of the European Union, including my own, it is only by involving people and the citizens at the earliest possible stage of the accession process that we can ensure the best possible public acceptance of the results of the negotiations, and also in the long-term, of a greater understanding of the achievement of the European integration process. Sometimes, in our own member-countries, people question the value of the EU integration. And it is only by recalling the past and looking at the journey travelled that we remind ourselves how vital the European integration process has been on our continent in overcoming the conflicts of the past and also to ensure the long-lasting peace and stability for the citizens on the European continent. This week we are beginning the celebrations of the 20th anniversary of events which brought down one of the big remaining barriers within Europe - the Berlin Wall. 20 years ago it came crumbling down, brought down by the citizens themselves.

The European Union was able to absorb the aftermath and strengthen thus the integration process by bringing more countries into the European Union, making us now a family of 27 nations. Other countries are now waiting to join the European Union, including this country, which has been a candidate country since December 2005. It is important that we always recall

the past in order to emphasize that the European integration process remains vital for our future stability, particularly in the Balkan region which has seen so much conflict and difficulties in the recent past.

The aspiration to join the European Union is the ONE objective which certainly unites the people and all the ethnic communities of this country. We remember that it was the first country to sign the Stabilization and Accession Agreement which was established by the European Union to help the Balkan countries prepare for the accession process. It was in 2001 - a difficult year for the country because of the conflict which caused many deaths and which emphasized the crucial importance of overcoming the ethnic tensions. The European Union played an important role in helping the country’s leaders overcome that conflict by the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement on 13th August 2001. Despite that, later the same year, the Stabilization and Association Agreement was signed, which was the first step on the journey towards the European Union. Just few years after, the country’s leaders travelled to Dublin in March 2004 to present the application to join the European Union. Unfortunately, it was an event marked by tragedy - the death of President Trajkovski. Nevertheless, as a symbol of the great spirit of determination of the people of this country, a month later these same leaders went

back to Dublin to formally present the application to the Irish Prime Minister, because Ireland had the Presidency of the European Union at that time.

Subsequently, in December 2005, the European Union decided to grant the country candidate status - recognition of the enormous efforts made by the country's leaders to overcome the divisions of the past. It also encouraged the leaders and all the political parties to work together in a spirit of consensus in order to achieve the reforms that would help the country reach the standards in legal aspects, independence of judiciary and the fight against corruption, to prepare for European Union accession. The elections in July 2006 brought a change of government which led to a number of difficulties with the political dialogue. Both I and my American colleague had to make enormous efforts to emphasize to the country's leaders the critical importance of maintaining a permanent dialogue between all the parties as the only way to resolve problems and to promote consensus.

In early 2008 we had some good progress in a number of reforms which prompted Commissioner Rehn to come to the country and highlight some of the key reforms which could help the country move to the next stage of the accession process: setting a date for opening negotiations. These were the so called benchmarks, eight priority reforms which are at the heart of the overall reform process. I should stress that the purpose of the Commissioner in doing this was to assist the Government in focusing their minds on the task at hand and reminding the Government and the political leaders of their responsibilities as a candidate country. Being granted candidate status and acceding to the European Union offers many opportunities, but also obligations. It was important to remind the country's leaders of those obligations that are

there because the country wants to join the European Union. However, these reforms are vital for the country's future economic and social development and the prosperity of the citizens, even if the EU was not there. We have been constantly emphasizing these facts.

In March 2008, following the adoption of the Accession Partnership which set out key short- and medium-term priorities, the Commissioner came and presented these benchmarks. We were quite optimistic that things would be moving forward and that 2008 could mark a historic development in the country's prospects for EU accession. Unfortunately, the Elections of 2008 destroyed that hope. These were elections marked by violence, intimidation, many irregularities, and it was a major set-back for the country. But we have now overcome that. The Elections of last March, although by no means perfect, re-established confidence in the country's capacity and political will to organize elections in accordance with international standards. Again there were some problems, such as the issue of intimidation. These are issues that have to be addressed by the Government and the political parties, to make sure that the next elections will be fully in accordance with all international standards. This, after all, is in the interest of the citizens, to have stability, to exercise their vote a calm atmosphere, free from intimidation and violence.

Since then we have seen an extremely good progress, particularly in the last two months, following the changes in a number of Ministers, the appointment of the new Deputy Prime Minister following the resignation of the previous one. We are greatly encouraged by the efforts that have been undertaken recently, because they have demonstrated the commitment of the Government and all the leaders to work towards a spirit of consensus in adopting the reforms.

I would highlight a few of these. First of all, the in-



dependence of the judiciary. Most of the opinion polls have shown that the one institution that has the least confidence from the citizens is the judiciary. Perceived political interference and long delays in court proceedings are only part of the reasons. We get many petitions every week from citizens and companies, who feel that their rights have not been respected, who have been subject of judgments that have not been enforced, and who are appealing to us to intervene. This is a reflection of a dysfunctional judicial system, thereby requiring enormous efforts to strengthen the independence of the judiciary. Financial resources of the European Union have been used to establish the Academy for Training of Judges and Public Prosecutors and there has been relatively good progress. Nevertheless, this is a long-term process and will require constant effort by the country.

Another important area is the fight against corruption. Corruption is not particular to this country; it is endemic for many countries in the Balkan region, and beyond. It is something that has to be wiped out once-and-for-all. There must be zero tolerance in the fight against corruption. Here the problem was the lack of cooperation between the various law enforcement agencies. This was considerably improved, and

we hope that with the laws that have been adopted recently the work in that area will continue.

The third area which has been perhaps the weakest in the process has been the public administration. This country has suffered from a highly politicized public administration. Each time there is a new government, whether at the national or local level, civil servants are thrown out, changed. There is no continuity and thus no professional public administration that can drive the reform process. We have been encouraged by the new developments and the commitment by the Prime Minister to do everything possible to establish a professional, depoliticized public administration. It is important because even after the last Local and Presidential Elections in March, in a number of municipalities where there has been a new Mayor, some staff that benefited from training from the European Union were dismissed. This will be a disincentive to the European Union to offer training if these people on the next elections will be dismissed, hence depriving the municipality of much needed expertise. Today, as we speak, the Parliament is to adopt the latest Law on Public Administration. This is all very important and demonstrates the commitment of the Government and all the political parties to move forward.

Adopting legislation is good, it shows a good com-

mitment, but it is not enough. What is absolutely needed is effective implementation. The legislator has to have in mind that the legislation adopted needs adequate resources - human resources in the administration and financial resources to guarantee that laws will be enforced. Additionally, there has to be supervision to make sure that it is fully implemented. Otherwise it defeats the purpose of the legislation.

All of this is very positive and we are hoping that if these efforts continue in the next weeks, the Commission will have enough arguments to make a recommendation in its October Report for opening Accession Negotiations. If a recommendation is made, it goes to the Council of the European Union for adoption where traditionally the decisions relating to the enlargement process are taken by unanimity. The recommendation itself will send a strong political signal reinforcing the European vocation of the country, and also helping in strengthening business confidence in the future of the country.

We will continue to support the Macedonian Government, and all sectors of society through our finan-

cial resources, with a budget of approximately half a billion euro that goes towards helping the reform process at national and local level. I stress the local level because it is at the local level where democracy works, and is closest to the citizens. This is why public debates such as this one today are so important. They make you aware of what is being discussed and decided. Part of this cooperation is also strengthening the cooperation with the neighbors. There is cross border cooperation already in place with Greece, Albania and Bulgaria. For example, there are already successful projects developed with Greece demonstrating that, regardless of political considerations, the neighboring communities can work together in a spirit of friendship and confidence. Ending on an optimistic and hopeful note, I have seen enormous developments in the recent weeks. If this becomes a permanent process, particularly after the Commission's Report, thus altering the practice of one day of progress and next day a step back, then the future of the country within the European Union is assured.



“Because of the profound reforms we had to be reborn as a state”

EUROPEAN INSTITUTE
OF ROMANIA

Iulia Serafimescu,
Associate Editor of the
Romanian Journal for
European Affairs



Sharing with you some of Romania’s experience with the European Union both pre- and post-accession may prove helpful in determining further strategic options for Macedonia, as regards its accession process.

Romania’s answer to the question “Why the EU?” was clear from the very beginning. It has very much to do with the moment when the accession process began, in 1989, and the context that it began in. It was a process of returning to Europe. The accession negotiations were perceived by the people in Romania like breaking up with the past, with the communist legacy, with 40 years of communist rule. Romania was now heading towards accession in the Western world where all institutions uphold the democratic principles that it was also striving to abide by. Moreover, in the pre-accession period, Romania had the experience of returning to Central Europe. Even though geographically it had been there all along, the symbolical “returning” was related to the perception that being among the Central European states was a confirmation that it was on the right path, to the EU.

The first step on the road to the EU was the signing of the European Agreement in 1993. The accession negotiations were opened in 2000, and conducted in 31 chapters. Some of those chapters were extremely sensitive, but we managed to pull through and complete

the negotiations in 2004. The pace of the negotiations was set by the success Romania had in transposing and adopting the EU legislation. However, this process was far from being a one way street. Legislation once adopted had to be implemented, and guarantees were scarce that this would become reality. Adopting laws or approximating legislation is never enough. In this sense our accession process was a real marathon that showed how Romania is lagging behind the other acceding countries, even though we had started off on equal footing and we were all supposed to fulfil the same criteria. So in 2004, when we got confronted with that fact we started the final run towards meeting the deadline in January 2007. Some of the major challenges relate to a series of very sensitive negotiation chapters; and here I would name the four chapters which really gave a hard time to Romanian public authorities in the negotiations with Brussels. The movement of capital, for instance, was particularly sensitive in the sense that one of its dimensions was allowing EU citizens from other Member States to purchase agricultural land and forestry on the territory of Romania upon accession. This was particularly sensitive because property rights in Romania had just come up after 40 years of state ownership. Giving that away was really, really challenging and negotiated harshly with Brussels. Then there was the chapter on competi-



tion policy, where the main problem was the legislation relating to state aid. The Romanian state had to push forward towards restructuring the industry and privatization, but not by increasing the subsidies and, by consequence, state aid. Environment was another extremely difficult chapter. This was so because the implications of the talks regarding environment measures reverberated in all sectors of the economy. In order to apply environment measures in Romania you had to convince pretty much all the actors involved in industry and the civil society. Changes needed to be made, changes which were very costly for the Romanian economy itself. This posed difficulties to a country which had virtually no experience with issues pertaining to environmental protection. Finally, cooperation in the field of justice and home affairs and the related policies meant ensuring that the Union is a space of freedom, security and justice. In order to comply with the prerequisites of these policies, Romania had to be

born again as a state, because of the profound reforms in the sector of public administration and also of the judicial-related reforms.

Further on, it has to be noted that for Romania the process of EU integration went hand in hand with NATO integration. The two processes were intertwined from the very beginning. Romania eventually became a member of the Council of Europe in 1993, a membership which acknowledged Romania's commitment to democratic principles; one year later we signed an agreement with NATO, which was the first step towards NATO membership. Then we had the Europe Agreement signed with the European Union, meaning free trade in industrial goods. All this was ultimately possible because starting from the 1990s we had a very strong domestic political consensus regarding the importance of the accession process for Romania. All political forces were aware of what was needed in order to pull through and this involved, indeed, a lot



of political compromise at the domestic level. These developments were very difficult because Romania was trying to cope with two different processes at the same time - different but nevertheless related. The first was transition; we were emerging after 40 years or so of communism, striving to catch up. And this was by no means an easy task, especially in the field of economy. The second one was the EU accession process which sometimes presented requirements different from those imposed at the domestic level by the transition process. In any case, both transition and accession to the EU required democratization. One of the major dangers was that the democratization tended to be viewed at the level of political actors not as a goal per se, but as a smaller goal within the goal of EU membership. This was very dangerous because in order to be genuine and to produce effects, the democratization has to be a goal in itself.

In the end, Romania succeeded; on the 1st Janu-

ary 2007 we became a Member State of the European Union and Romania started to be represented at political level in the institutions of the Union. Civil society "reacted" to the accession, and EU affairs became more and more debated upon in Romania, especially through the lens of the media. The pressure at the level of NGOs and the various organizations of the civil society who were really pushing for the reforms to continue did not cease. This is a major aspect.

Two years after accession, one would say that the economic development of Romania is the main benefit of this process. Nevertheless, the main thing to be emphasized here is that it is not really the accession date itself which is of paramount importance; it is not the fact that we became a Member on the 1st of January 2007 that made all the difference in terms of economy. The economic development which resulted was basically coming mainly from the efforts that Romania made in the pre-accession period, combined with the



growing interest of foreign investors and foreign international institutions for Romania as the accession calendar was becoming clear.

The topic of the day as regards the economic situation in Romania is the absorption of EU funds. Romania still has one of the lowest absorption rates for EU funding in the whole of Europe. You can see some statistics, that do not look very well. Part of the problem is that there isn't yet enough expertise at the level of the applicants for EU funding as well as at the level of the public authorities who are involved in managing the projects submitted for evaluation, and the expertise regards precisely the way these projects are supposed to be designed in order to successful. Another problem is the fact that, two years after accession, Romanians still feel to a degree that the political representation of Romania in the EU bodies after 2007 does not match the expected changes in the social dimension. And in this respect, work restrictions are still in place for Romanians in several EU Member States.

Other than that, Romania is regarded to have scored positive results in matters of good governance. Nevertheless, the fact that we became a Member in January 2007 doesn't mean that our job is done: Romania is still under verification, under a semi-annual reporting system which concerns very sensitive issues. Some of the issues are common to Romania and Macedonia, such as the issue of corruption. And by means of these reports, the Commission is trying to assist Romania in order to deal with its problems, fulfil the benchmarks set and rise to the challenge of being an EU Member State. Still, in spite of the fact that we are still struggling with some problems persisting from the pre-accession period, polls show Romanians to be positive as regards the EU. Ultimately it is this attitude, together with the efforts of the public authorities that will help Romania to make the best of its opportunities as a Member State.

“EU Accession should be priority number one”

INSTITUTE FOR EUROPEAN POLICY - EUROPEUM

Vladimir Bartovic M.A.,
Senior Researcher



The Czech Republic and Slovenia, or rather their perspectives and their road to the EU, are quite similar. There were 8 countries from Eastern Europe, which were formerly socialist and strived to enter the EU. Slovenia and the Czech Republic were on the first two places, if we are talking about development or about GDP level. Their starting position and problems were basically the same. When the changes in 1989 happened in the Czech Republic or in Czechoslovakia at that time, the people thought - that in 3 - 4 years, maximum 5 years we would be members of the EU. However, we were postponing this date all the time, so eventually we realized that it would not be 1995, it also would not be 1996, neither 1998 nor 2000 or even 2001. These expectations were also supported by politicians in Western Europe. For example French President Jacques Chirac eventually said that the Czech Republic could join the EU around 1998. All this, and the predominant opinion of the Czech politicians that we are the most developed country among the applicants, convinced many people that the Czech Republic would actually and really negotiate with the EU the conditions of its accession. Czech Republic was together with Slovenia the last ones to submit the official application to the EU.

It came as a shock to our negotiators, when the negotiations were started, that it was not so much discus-

sion about the conditions of entrance, but to a large extent a “take it or leave it” exercise. The EU is a club that has strict rules. There are tens of thousands of pages of European legislation and you simply cannot impose any conditions. All you can negotiate are transitional periods and exceptions in certain limited areas. Some Czech politicians were taken by surprise. There were even some crazy ideas like joining the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement, the NAFTA in case the EU would not accept our conditions. We had many similar awkward ideas. Luckily for us, we soon understood that there is no other option but the EU. The question of EU membership was absorbed and consensus was reached.

The period of Accession Negotiations with the EU was the best period in terms of reforms. I have in mind the conditions that we had to meet in this process since 1990, but the real work started with the negotiations. It was amazing to see how the administration, the politicians, and the Parliament, were able to pass laws as if put on a conveyor band at the FORD Motor Company. It was enough to say it is an EU requirement and there would be almost no discussion on the law. Of course this had also negative impacts - such as problems with the implementation of those laws. However, many other countries faced the same problem. We passed thousands of pages of legislation without being prepared to implement it.

Fortunately the EU was watching very closely. Just as you are now obsessed with the Progress Report we were the same. Looking at each word, whether it is long-term, medium-term or short-term perspective, whether the performance is good, very good or acceptable. One has to bear in mind that besides fulfilling the technical criteria there is also the political side. There has to be political will to take the country in, and in order to have that you need to lobby the Member States. The Czech Negotiations were accelerated by the group's dynamic and the pressure from the public. The acceding countries were always competing. The journalists were continuously comparing the progress in opening and closing the chapters from the EU legislation. One could often read that the Czech Republic closed 12 chapters, but Slovenia closed 16. Next time,

it was Slovakia which was ahead of us, so, we had to work to catch up. This helped the situation a lot. Croatia is missing this group dynamics, and you will be missing it too. However, it is the EU that has to manage the negotiating positions of 27 Member States, and it is the EU that dictates the process.

On the 1st of May 2004 we were finally "Back to Europe" - although the most obvious benefit came only later in 2008 - the entrance into the Schengen Zone. All the Czechs could now travel freely and cross borders only with IDs.

There were also some negative aspects of the accession process - such as misconceptions in the public about the conditions of the EU membership. For example, there was the myth that once we were in the EU we would have to get rid of our sausages and our



special rum. The Government had to continuously correct these misunderstandings and also had to launch a campaign to explain the EU and the conditions of the membership to people.

One of the most sensitive questions during the negotiations were the transitional periods impeding free movement of workers from the CEE countries to the "old" EU member states. During the negotiations we tried to explain that we were different from Poland or the Baltic countries and similarly to Slovenia we were rather attracting foreign workers (Ukrainians, Moldovans). This was also proven after the accession when many Czechs left the country to search for a job in the older EU Member States. However, the answer was that we are still underdeveloped for the EU, and almost all the EU Member States (with exception from Great Britain, Ireland and Sweden) kept their transitional periods for the Czech workers at least for one year, while Austria and Germany are preserving restriction for Czech's access to their labour market. This was

probably the reason why many Czechs could feel like second class members of the Union.

As all new Member States were struggling for the removal of the restrictions for access to the labour market, suddenly before the start of the economic crisis politicians in Poland and Latvia realised the brain-drain is a serious problem for their economies, and there is almost no skilful work force remaining in the country. Due to this one of the panels at the Central European Economic Forum in Krynica in Poland, focused on the topic "How to stop job migration?!" It was here where the argument of the Czech Republic was confirmed that we are different from the others, and this question went into history.

What the EU membership brought to the Czech Republic was certainly the economic boost. The export just in the year 2004 rose by around 20%. The GDP boosted and GDP growth in the years following the EU accession was 4-5% each year. The inflow of foreign direct investments increased dramatically. The





unemployment rate lowered and the standard of living rose. The economic situation has changed slightly with the current crises. However, EU coordinated actions against the crisis helped people to feel more secure. According to Euro-barometers, the Czechs are among the most optimistic about EU membership being beneficial for them.

Europeanization of Czech society was the benefit that became visible later on. The citizens are getting used to the EU. Now that citizens can travel freely, work more or less freely, they are members of “the club”, and eligible for all EU Funds and they are more willing to take others on board. According to recent polls more than 70% of the Czechs want to welcome Croatia and other countries. On the other hand the process of Europeanization was felt less among the Czech political elite. The views on the political scene towards the EU were quite polarized. The change was brought about by the Czech EU Presidency. The Czech EU Presidency

changed the perception even among the politicians; they started becoming more aware of the obligations stemming from EU Membership. One could see that the EU is no longer a foreign policy issue, but increasingly a domestic one. The discussions about the Lisbon Treaty are the best proof of this change of perception. They are domestic political discussion of top priority. The Czech Republic would probably be the last one to ratify the Lisbon Treaty, but eventually the pressure on the politicians will grow and the Treaty will be ratified.

To wrap up, the EU journey of the Czech Republic was quite smooth. It lasted longer than expected, but it was smooth. Other countries, like Slovakia maybe, could serve better as an example to Macedonia. The most important thing is to put the EU Accession as top priority. Priority number one! If you do that, the reform process can go very smoothly and the accession will be accelerated. This would mean getting on the fast track to the EU. I wish Macedonia to move to the fast track.

“To join the European Union you should utilize threefold partnership: domestic, regional and international”

EMBASSY OF ROMANIA

H.E. Dr. Adrian Stefan
Constantinescu,
Ambassador



I would like to review some of my conclusions with respect to our experience in terms of strategic partnership. I think strategic partnerships are extremely important for getting into the European Union. I would start by underlining the fact that accession to the EU proves to be an ever more complex and cumbersome process. Enlargement fatigue is a jargon which proves to be very real nowadays. In order to succeed, for all parties concerned there is a need for wisdom, for clear perspective on the future, there is a need for stubbornness in fighting hardships, flexibility in taking up challenges as there is an actual openness towards positive compromises.

Romania's own experience highlights the fact that in addressing the issue of the EU accession, strategic partnerships should be seen as a threefold endeavor: domestic or internal partnerships, regional and finally multiregional or international strategic partnership. In a few words I would highlight why these three categories of strategic partnerships are so important.

First is the domestic partnership, which is in my opinion the most important and dominant partnership. First we should take into consideration the fact that EU accession is THE national objective, not A national objective. I would underline this short 'THE'. In order to unite the nation around this national objective, it is necessary that: a) all political leaders leave

aside ideological and/or alter ego's differences and speak in the same voice. This is extremely important. And b) the whole civil society should be informed and act in the same direction. This was the experience of Romania. As an example, we had the gathering of all the political forces in Romania already at the beginning of the 1990s and their involvement in the elaboration of the so-called Snagov, (the name of a lake resort near Bucharest) Strategy. Irrespective of both the ideological and political orientation of the political forces, all of them got together in Snagov in order to contemplate on the possibility of joining the Euro-Atlantic structures and to elaborate a comprehensive strategy in order to abide by the rules, principles and disciplines of the respective institutions. The "Snagov Strategy" was welcomed by all the political parties and by the whole civil society and it helped in reaching a single voice with respect to the relationships with the respective Euro-Atlantic institutions. The benefits were the following: consolidation of democracy, because the dialogue helps in reaching a better-shaped democracy; speeding up of economic reforms, because the strategy helped in getting together all the productive and academic forces in order to design and to push the reform-oriented policies; better social atmosphere, because in social terms there was a global social agreement for reaching the objectives of

joining the Euro-Atlantic institutions; and last but not least, growing sentiments of better perspectives and increased wellbeing. This is one of the most important benefits for the whole society because otherwise the citizens would have not been convinced to engage in efforts and hardships, in order to face the challenges, since this is a very challenging process all of us should be very well aware of.

The regional partnerships are certainly not the most important but they are partnerships without which no country can imagine fast progress in the process. There are several reasons for this. Teaming up with other candidates in the same region multiplies and strengthens the chances for success. I would like to mention with respect to our experience, that the teaming up with Bulgaria at that time was quite beneficial, even though we had quite different economic structures and political orientations. So, why not use this experience and team up with some other countries knocking at the door of the Euro-Atlantic institutions. I would not name countries, since you know which are the countries and at which level they succeeded in fulfilling the conditions for joining the respective institutions. I would stress that, in any case, sound policies in a multiethnic society are another condition or instrument which helps improving the nation's regional role in providing peace and stability. This is very important for EU's continental role in the field and this is also starting from the Romanian experience. We also had some issues to be solved in this field, although, I would dare to say, not so delicate as in Macedonia.

Last but not least are the good neighborly policies. They are extremely important and A MUST in the accession process. Examples from the Romanian experience are the following: Romania teamed up with Bulgaria; Romania's minority policy; and Romania's good

or very good - I hope you've noticed the nuance: good OR very good relations with its neighbors. The benefits are obvious. Teaming up with Bulgaria meant negotiating power; sound multiethnic policies led to ethnic global peace and there was also a better visibility of Romania's role as a peace-provider and keen watch-dog at the eastern EU borders. This is very important because besides Finland, Romania has the longest external border of the European Union, so we have a role to play in this field as a so-called watch-dog. I know that sometimes this sounds a little bit awkward, but in a proper sense of the word, I am using the word in a positive manner.

For international partnership which is important, but not decisive, I would highlight the following: in order to prove a candidate-country's importance for accepting it into the Euro-Atlantic structures, and I mean by this mostly the European Union, the country in question has to prove an intelligent activism in international or global affairs in consonance with the EU's policies and activities in the respective fields. In other words - not to have different stand points or different positions that might counteract or contradict EU's action in the respective fora.

And secondly, and this is important also, the so-called sponsorship from an older or from several older and powerful EU members. Examples again from our own experience would be the following: with respect to activism in international and global affairs, we were from the candidate-country stage teaming up with or supporting EU's initiatives in the international fora. As for example, United Nations, WTO - World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, etc. So, in other words we were aligning with the EU concerning the common policies, common standpoints or positions in these fora already before becoming a

member and proving the so-called regional patriotism, if I may say so. It is an awkward combination, but still it shows that every candidate-country before becoming a “fully-fledged” member should prove it belongs to the club. Another informal example was France’s sponsorship for Romania and Germany’s sponsorship for Bulgaria. These are two old and powerful members who helped Romania’s and Bulgaria’s advancement towards the EU membership. International partnerships can contribute to better support and promotion of a country’s stands and profile in the EU. There can also be instrumental and technical, financial and political assistance in the process of legislative approximation.

In conclusion, which are the consequences or the benefits of these threefold strategic partnerships? I will name them in a chronological order as far as Romania was concerned. First, fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria - in other words the political criteria in order to become eligible for EU Membership. Second, recognition of a functional market economy, which is

another very important condition, in the absence of which one cannot hope of getting into the European Union, because it would be detrimental to its own economy. Third and final is the start of the accession negotiations on the basis of fulfilling these political and economic conditions. I make the parenthesis here and I hope that the upcoming report will indicate the readiness of both parties concerned - the EU and Macedonia - to start negotiations. And this is very important - once the negotiations are finalized, the political will for completing the negotiations must be assured. Without completing the negotiations and without the political will to ratify the results of the negotiations by member countries, all efforts are in vain.

In concluding my remarks, I would like to once again assure everybody that Romania is ready and willing to support Macedonia in its endeavor to accede into the European Union as well as NATO. In doing so and having such a position I would like to assure you of our friendship and our support.





“Dialogue with civil society is a strategic internal partnership”

EMBASSY OF THE
SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Dr. Robert Kirnag,
Chargée d’Affaires



Speaking on strategic partnerships I would like to mention three areas or three possible partnerships. These are partnerships that are created before joining the EU but they also exist after joining the EU. You should keep in mind that concentrating only on the opening of the accession negotiations and the negotiations themselves is not a very ambitious goal. Instead, you should concentrate on how you would function and interact as a Member State, because time will pass, and soon Macedonia will become an EU Member State.

For starters, let me tell you what kind of internal partnerships we had in Slovakia before joining the EU. In the first level, there was the partnership between the line ministries in the Government. At the beginning all the ministries thought EU is part of the foreign policy, and thus it is part of the business of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which had to establish a structure for communication and then spread it to all the line ministries. Then we had discussions or communication between the line ministries, the cabinet and the office of the Government in order to coordinate our European participation in the decision-making process, which was again the task of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to voice it out.

On the second level, there was the partnership within the administration. It was one of the most important and at the same time difficult benchmarks for Macedonia to reform its public administration. A les-

son well learned will be that, while you reform it, do it so that it is better prepared to work for Macedonia as an EU Member State. If you reform your public administration now and you set up certain structures and procedures it would be very difficult to change them in the future. If they are not set properly they will prove to be a hurdle on the way. This is our experience and we are here to share our successes and lessons learned with you. Perhaps the lessons learned will be more inspiring, because they will teach you to avoid our mistakes for which we paid dearly. Communication between the ministries, the Government and our mission in Brussels, and the proper functioning of the administration proved to be very important because today there are 91 Slovaks at the Mission in Brussels only. All the ministries are represented there. One-fifth of all Slovak diplomats are posted in Brussels. It is very important to be coordinated properly.

The third level are the other internal partnerships, such as partnerships with social partners, business associations etc. You will need these partnerships in the future, because you will not be able to quantify the consequences of some decisions, like CO2 emissions for example, without their help. The Government may not know what does such a decision mean for automotive industry, but the businesses will be able to exactly quantify it. They know how much it would cost them, and whether they are able to comply or



not. Legislation is easy, just raise a hand and the directive is adopted, but businesses will have to bear the consequences. They will have to fire people if something goes wrong. So employees, trade unions, social dialogue are very crucial. With the economic crisis we saw how important it is to have good communication and understanding with social partners. In Slovakia, we almost destroyed the trade unions, and we had to rebuild the social dialogue again. So, to extend this internal partnership to a point of strategic partnership with Macedonia, in last week's visit by our Minister of Labor to Macedonia at the closing conference of a very successful twinning project - review of the national labor legislation. The two ministers agreed to venture into a very sensitive area - support of the development of the social dialogue in Macedonia. It is not easy for the trade unions or for the Government to reach out. Nevertheless, it is very important to have social peace during these times of crisis. Simply put, it means that trade unions do not pressure the businesses to raise the wages above the level of the growth of productivity, which is the case of Slovakia.

Then there are other very important partnerships which we established internally. Strategic partnerships were established with universities, research centers, NGOs and etc. This Strategic Partnership is the dialog with the civil society. It should be in the interest of the Government to have this kind of partnership.

Slovakia is ready to support activities such as the establishment of a similar forum for dialogue with civil society like we have. It is a structured platform, not an institution, but an all-encompassing platform for debate about the EU. We started this even before the European Convention started. And the Slovak National Convention on the EU did not stop when the first draft of the European Constitution was tabled, we continued with this project; we have already successfully implemented it in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was started with NGOs in Serbia, and after the first year of financial support provided through our official development assistance, the European Commission took over in financing this project. All those actors that I've mentioned were part of this project.

Externally, when you are in the process of accession, you need to establish Strategic Partnerships with the EU Member States. You always have to find partners among the Member States that will be willing to fight for your interests. As a small country in the EU you can only be successful if you find enough partners to set a so-called shifting coalition. You also need to include one or two of the "big guys" because without them it won't be implemented easy. It does not, however, mean that you can lobby your way through. You have to do your homework, project an image of a reliable partner, and, yes, a good student.

50 години ЕУ во светот

Пронајдете се дел од проектот: АКЦИЈА ЗА ЕВРОПА



I was pleased to find out that the organizers of "Action for Europe" are preparing a conference next Tuesday with participants from Spain. It is extremely important that you work with the future EU Council Presidencies. Frankly, Spain does not have any vested interest in the Western Balkans, and the same applies to the next Presidency country - Belgium. Western Balkans and Macedonia must be kept on the Agenda, and they must be on top of the agenda. We must keep the process alive.

I am now going to the second type of partnerships - the partnership between Slovakia and Macedonia. On the political level we support your accession process in many ways. Slovakia was part of the pressure group within the European Union, the so-called Tallinn group, which fought to open up the borders. We know how it feels. It was only in November last year that we got a visa-free travel to the United States. And it is not for granted. We had to communicate with our people, tell them not to overstay, not to misuse the conditions of visa liberalization. If people do not respect the rules, the visa-free travel might be stopped, and it will be paid by the majority of population.

So, visa liberalization is very important and we expect many interactions between Slovakia and Macedonia. Eventually, we are looking for development of business, tourism and contacts between citizens of our two countries.

Other partnerships are the partnerships for the use of the European funds, the so-called twinning

projects. I mentioned one twinning project - Review of the National Labor Legislation. Social dialogue could be the next one and we've already discussed this with our colleagues from the Netherlands - why don't we try to do it in a trilateral project: an old member-state, new member-state and a candidate country. Another topic is, for example, decentralization. When I tell people here that our municipalities receive 70% of VAT they are surprised; but it is not for free, they have to perform certain competences. So, that's also the area where we can cooperate. Then a very specific area which might be very important for Macedonia is the implementation of the Directive of the European Community on the protection of employees against insolvency of employers.

Finally, there's the official development assistance. Slovakia is already active in this area. The Project "RELLMAS - support to the local and regional labor markets" is one successful example. Another starting project is the support for small and medium-sized enterprises in Macedonia. Next year in February I hope to start the program of the mini-grants. These are grants of up to 5,000 Euros which could prove to be especially important for small communities.

So, you can see, strategic partnerships could be forged in many areas. All of them, internal or external, are equally important for Macedonia. We are here to help you in those directions that you consider to be beneficial for you.

"Visa liberalisation needs to be appropriately communicated to the citizens"

MACEDONIAN CENTER
FOR EUROPEAN TRAINING

Lidija Dimova,
Executive Director



Visa liberalisation is probably the most popular topic in the Republic of Macedonia. The citizens are hopeful that very soon they will be able to travel to EU Member-States as well to the other States that are part of the Schengen system. For the time being, Macedonia is progressing well in fulfilling the requirements to be transferred to the so-called White Schengen List. The media are constantly covering the visa liberalisation story - including the procedure and the requirements that need to be met - but it is more than obvious that a real public campaign communicating to the citizens the advantages, but also the obligations stemming from visa-free travel is lacking.

To understand visa liberalisation better, one should probably go back to June 2003 during the Greek Presidency of the EU when the so-called Thessaloniki Agenda came to life. This presidency was extremely important, not just for Macedonia, but also for the Western Balkan region since only then did it become clear that the countries from the region have an European perspective and that the Stabilisation and Association Process will be the framework (or strategy) applied for enlargement of the EU with Western Balkans.

Our Macedonian experience however, has taught us that having a strategy without instruments for its implementation is yet another document stuck in

someone's drawer. The Thessaloniki Agenda, though, was much more than that. Namely, several new initiatives, accompanied by new financial programmes were made available for the Western Balkans. Apart from the so-called Community Programmes, the TAIEX and the Twinning instruments, the Thessaloniki Agenda envisaged the expansion of CEFTA, the implementation of the European Charter on Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, and the famous visa liberalisation.

In the initial phase, visa liberalisation was to be implemented through visa facilitation which implied easier access to visas for the Schengen countries for specific groups of citizens. The second phase envisaged fulfilling certain benchmarks previously determined in the document called Roadmap for Visa Liberalisation drafted by the European Commission.

The Roadmap specifies all the obligations that the Republic of Macedonia needs to meet to be granted visa-free travel. Those obligations are grouped into several sectors and once the European Commission is convinced that the benchmarks are fulfilled it will recommend visa-free travel. The decision will ultimately be taken by the Justice and Home Affairs Council of the EU, with a qualified majority vote.

The responsibility of the European Commission is enormous. Opening the borders for visa-free travel means opening the borders for easier movement of



crime and smuggling goods. Therefore, the European Commission must convince EUMS that their welfare and security are not jeopardized and offer the fulfilled benchmarks as proof for that. What does the European Union really fear? Well, firstly, that the citizens from the Western Balkans will not move massively into the EU on whatever grounds - employment or political asylum. In addition, EU must be sure that it has all the necessary information on the travelling citizens, and if they commit an illegal act, they should be able to return them to their native country or to the country from where they entered the EU if they are without the necessary documentation.

If we look into the Roadmap more closely, we will realise that all the requirements are actually making sure that that will not happen. Namely, the Western Balkan countries are required to have the so-called

integrated border management, to have signed readmission agreements, to have biometric passports, to have visa-centres, and to guarantee that their citizens enjoy fundamental rights. Now, let's see what that really means!

What are biometric passports and why are they necessary? Biometric passports have built in chips with important information concerning the person that travels. This information is stored in a special database which is connected to the Schengen Information System of the EU. This practically means that the holder of such a passport is surrendering his/her information voluntarily to the authorities of the country of entry the moment they pass the border, and if that country is part of the Schengen Information System, then all of the other participating countries have access to that specific info, as well.



Integrated border management is yet another system to monitor the person that enters/exits the territory of another country. Integrated border management pertains to the free movement of freight (goods). Once a truck loaded with - let's say - sugar enters the territory of Macedonia, the time of its entry and exit is registered. If the destination of the load is another country, when exiting Macedonia, the customs officials will know exactly where and how long the truck travelled, and if the truck spent more time than the usual (because it was unloading smuggled goods), then the customs officers would know that the truck is suspicious and could be subject to a thorough check on the border. Consequently, the work of the customs officers is made easier and their performance much better in the fight against smuggling goods.

Important about integrated border management

is that large investments in equipment are required for the border crossings. The European Commission however, fully aware of this, made funds available for that purpose, first through the CARDS programme, and now through IPA. If one looks into EU's assistance for Macedonia, you will realise that millions of Euros were programmed in CARDS from 2003 to 2006 and IPA 2007 and 2008, and even through the regional programmes, to complete integrated border management project. Subsequently, it is completely misleading to claim that this or that government secured visa liberalisation, because Macedonia has been working on integrated border management since 2002.

Respect for fundamental rights of citizens is another requirement that the countries must fulfill. The European Commission is not asking this just to make life difficult for the governments in the region, but it

has in mind the fact that access to personal documents (including passports) is a fundamental human right. Therefore, not surprisingly, the Western Balkan countries are required to enable access to documents and adopt an anti-discrimination act. In Macedonia, for example, many representatives from the Roma community are not registered within any system, not to mention having passports. The Law on Anti-Discrimination guarantees that massive political asylum seeking will not occur since the law is proof that all citizens enjoy equal political rights. The Republic of Macedonia has still not adopted such a law due to the sensitivity of the sexual orientation issue, the consequences however, could be grave if a large number of citizens start seeking political asylum in EUMS after visa liberalisation is granted.

The conclusion of readmission agreements stems from the obligation from the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. With these agreements, the EU is protecting itself from persons entering its territory without documentation as to seek political asylum. It is common knowledge that a great number of people enter the EU without any documents (or with documents, but they get rid of the documents once they are in the EU) and seek (unjustifiably) political asylum. If such persons hold no documents, then the EU sends them back to the country they came from in accordance with the readmission agreements signed, while the country where they are returned places them in the so-called visa centre and from that moment on,

they are in the trust of the country they came from. At this point, one should mention another European institution called Eurodac – an institution in charge of administering the fingerprints of the asylum seekers in the EU. This institution was established to prevent asylum seekers from travelling from one Schengen country to another seeking political asylum. That practically means that the moment someone seeks asylum, his/her fingerprints will be distributed to all Schengen countries.

This shows that visa liberalisation is a well-thought of policy of the EU which practically poses no threats whatsoever for the EU. The risk however is much greater for the Western Balkan countries, and therefore they need to communicate visa liberalisation appropriately to their citizens so that they understand well not just the advantages, but also their obligations. No doubt, the Government will find a way to promote visa-free travel – it will even be unusual if the Government did not use this opportunity to advertise its achievement and prove, yet again, that it works 24/7 and that it produces “achievements”. Visa liberalisation however demands educating the public about their rights, as well as obligations, to avoid the risk of jeopardizing the reputation of your country.

Hopefully, the Republic of Macedonia will be granted visa liberalisation by the EU, and hopefully the citizens will be more conscientious than the Government and will not start leaving the country in massive numbers.

“An open forum for discussion is more important for the process than the Government”

SLOVAK FOREIGN
POLICY ASSOCIATION

Mgr. Zuzana Lisonová,
Research Fellow and Project
Coordinator



I would like to share with you the Slovak experience from a very different kind of partnership, one that was very important for the accession process as it is important now for the EU membership. In order to prepare, our, at that time Chief Negotiator, and first Commissioner, Mr. Ján Figel, initiated an institutional platform run by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that was to discuss and coordinate the efforts for EU accession. There were several experts and many participants who sat together and shared their views on the accession process. As time passed we got to the conclusion that we needed to structure this debate, to cover different sectors; we needed to prepare the discussion and establish certain rules. We ended up with a whole project known as National Convention on the European Union. The project meant involving civil society into Slovakia's efforts to facilitate the accession process and to prepare Slovakia for the future membership.

Debating the process of European Integration can be seen as a political and diplomatic process if you only look at the bureaucratic aspects of the process. To avoid this kind of situation it is very important to get as many people together and to discuss as many things as possible. That's why we decided to have three basic pillars within the project. First, we needed to have the governmental representatives because they are responsible and they have the most recent and expert information. Second,

we have parliament representatives - it doesn't matter if it is a coalition or opposition MP; MPs also have responsibility - we elected him or her and he/she has his/her responsibilities towards us and he or she is passing the very necessary legislative acts. The widest of these pillars is the non-governmental sector. We felt that it is necessary for municipalities, for small towns to have their voice heard within this process. Different governmental or non-governmental organizations no matter if they provide social services, if they take care of small children or if they deal, as we do, with foreign policy issues, had to be represented. We as citizens are very important, we are the biggest part of the society and we have the right to deal with these issues because European membership creates conditions for our everyday life, and already for each of you because you have to comply with different things as the integration is advancing.

These three pillars were presented by very important people like the Deputy Prime Minister or the Minister of Foreign Affairs or the Chairman of the Parliament Committee for European Integration in order to have bigger visibility. It was very important and also useful to have experts on board, for example academics, professors and economists, representatives of trade unions, small entrepreneurship, regular officials from different ministries and so on. They got together in different working groups made up of 5 to 30 people

depending on the topic to be discussed on the meetings. At the end we created 11 different working groups which dealt with very precise issues in economic policy such as entering the euro-zone. Slovakia entered the euro-zone this year, but the debates and preparations have been done in previous years. We also discussed science, culture and education, because we feel that we need to find some topics that citizens find important and that are important for the way they look at Europe. Very important part of the discussion were the agricultural issues, the environment, the regional policy, but also the discussions on how we should spend the money that we are given by the European Union and by other member-states, on how to develop our regions and policies using the money. Within the regional policy, especially the EU funds, we had the best example of how important these discussions were, because people met across the groups, spent a lot of time discussing and preparing recommendations for the government. The Government was preparing documents that were presented in Brussels and that were the rules of how we will spend our money and how we will develop our country. Within this final strategies and documents 70% of the recommendations prepared by our experts from the National Convention were implemented in the final texts. So this was a very huge success; trade unions or the municipalities or any other actor in the society by themselves would not have succeeded because they were alone. Within the National Conventions we were all together with the governmental officials, with the Parliament officials and with the non-governmental sector.

The basic rule was that each of the working groups met 4 times a year; before the actual meeting, the exports would prepare an agenda; they would set up

some documents that the members of the working groups would then study, discuss and at the end they would prepare specific recommendations for the Government. Although the discussions were often wide, at the same time we could not involve the general public because of many logistical issues. That's why we also worked with the media. After each working group session there was a small press conference, or often breakfast with the journalists. We told journalists very exciting details, for example, how the implementation of the directive on water would influence the budget of small towns in central Slovakia. These were things that were important for the everyday life of the people and the regions. Another thing that we used within the National Convention as a tool to communicate and to involve the public was the website, the Slovak version is still available.

As we had several different topics we got also several different partners during the project. Very important or even the most crucial one was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic because the ministry is coordinating all EU issues. The Government Office of the Slovak Republic was important as well because of other institutional things. Soon we found out that there was a key interest from outside; the Representation of the European Commission in Slovakia cooperated on our activities. The British Embassy was also very supportive. The project was very interesting for our partners, European Movement in Serbia, so we have done the same project together with them. As the situation in each candidate or potential candidate is different we needed to create different working groups. In the Serbian case they created working groups on political conditionality and domestic institutions but also on regional cooperation, on capital





and services, goods, agriculture and freedom and security. These projects were supported not only by Slovak Aid (Official Development Assistance), but also later on by the European Commission itself. I might as well mention that actually the members of the Serbian Parliament were also taking part in preparing the recommendations of the National Convention for the Serbian Government. Another project was the National Convention in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where

economy, agriculture and regional cooperation are things that really matter. We shared our experiences with them as well. The Slovak experts who participated on the Slovak Convention are now working on the National Convention in Bosnia. They are attending the Bosnian meetings and sharing their experience also on new topics such as the IT sector and the information society.

“We need citizens and media that are critical – We need civil society to be interested and engaged”

EMBASSY OF THE
FEDERAL REPUBLIC
OF GERMANY

H.E. Ms. Ulrike Maria Knotz,
Ambassador



Let me present the German policy concerning the European integration, i.e. the German policy concerning the integration of the Republic of Macedonia to the European Union. First I would like to say some words on the general German policy itself, on the German point of view of integration.

Germany is one of the six founding members of the European Union, which was then called the European Economic Community (EEC). It was founded by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. German policy was always very much oriented towards European integration. In the beginning there were two reasons: the first reason is that Germany after the Second World War was kind of an outcast in the international society.

Germany was guilty for the Second World War and it was completely destroyed and ruled by the international community. We had to be re-educated into democracy. For Germany the integration into international structures, like the EEC and NATO meant second acceptance in the international community, a chance to regain respectability and influence.

The second reason was economic: the German economy has always depended to a large degree on exports. Germany was interested to have free access to European markets. This was the basic deal in the beginning. Values of course played an important role, but in the beginning the European Union was all about the

economy. For Germany, it was the possibility to gain market access, for France it was the chance to get support for agriculture. Agriculture in every country is a sensitive issue and an area that cannot withstand the market pressure. France at that time was very much an agricultural country. The basic deal in the origins of the European Economic Community was that Germany would get free market access and France would get support for its agriculture with Community money. Even today, more than 40% of the European budget is for agriculture.

This was the start of the European Economic Community, which today is the European Union. The name was changed in 1992. The whole European project has changed considerably. Today, practically no policy area remains outside the competences of the European Union, for example, the environment, regional development, social policy, education and even foreign policy. All these policies are not guided only by the nation states, but by the European Community as well. As a matter of fact, the biggest part of the national legislation in the member-states comes from Brussels, or is in one way or the other dependent on Brussels. We in Germany find this to be a good thing, because nowadays countries cannot solve their problems on their own, they need to work together. The European integration means that we can also have a say

in international issues. This is only possible when we are united. The terrible civil wars in the Balkans in the 1990s after the Yugoslav Federation fell apart, showed the member-states of the European Union that they have to act together; otherwise they do not have any influence. This was the starting point of the Common Policy in Security and Defence.

Now I come to enlargement, the second point that I wanted to discuss. Germany has always been an advocate for enlargement. We supported the Central and Eastern European states but we also very much support Macedonia in its efforts to become a EU member. The accession to the European Union is very popular in Macedonia. The latest Euro-barometer survey shows that 74% of the population is in favour of the integration of Macedonia into the European Union. This is the highest support in the entire Balkan region. Macedonia is already very closely linked to the EU. We should not forget that. The result of those close relations is a kind of a strategic partnership. In 2001 the Stabilization and Association Agreement between Macedonia and the EU was signed. Macedonia was the first country in the region to have such an agreement. The Agreement facilitates free trade and cooperation in many fields: energy, economic development, education, culture, environment etc. It also means much more money. Through the so called IPA Funds, for example, Macedonia will get more than 500 million Euros from 2007 to 2013 from the budget of the European Union.

In 2005, Macedonia gained the candidate country status. The candidate status means that the country is qualified to be a future member of the EU, and it means that the country has to adapt itself to its European partners, to the EU. It also means that the country has to make political and economic reforms. You have read and heard many times about the famous benchmarks

Macedonia has to meet. Why those benchmarks? The benchmarks are an indicator on the stand or success of reforms in different fields. The reforms that are measured by the benchmarks have one aim: to guarantee that the political principles and political values of the EU are guaranteed. Those principles and values are not granted, they have to be worked on, and sometimes people have to take care of and be aware that they are respected. We as Germans have experience with two dictatorships. First there was the Nazi period from 1933 until 1945 and then it was the Communist system in Eastern Germany that lasted for 40 years. So, we know what can happen to a society that doesn't value and respect the basic democratic principles and liberties.

The Copenhagen criteria name the four principles and values. They are democracy, human rights, rule of law and market economy. I would like to say a few words on each of them. Human beings do not want to be governed by somebody else, they want to govern themselves. The means for that is the democratic system, election of the Parliament, and election of the Government by the Parliament. This is why the manner in which the last Presidential and Local Elections in Macedonia were carried out was important. It was of great importance to show this status or the development of elections in the country, because elections must be carried out without intimidation or pressure. People must be able to vote freely. They should not be influenced by other people. What is equally important for democracy is political dialogue. This means that parties respect each other; that they do not treat each other as the enemy which has to be defeated and marginalized. They should rather see each other as in competition for the best solution to political problems. They should also try to cooperate when necessary. In a democracy



it's normal that different parties have different views. Each view must be considered as legitimate. It is not illegitimate to have a different view than somebody else. That is in fact pluralism. The fact that people think differently and that they have different interests has to be accepted. What is important is that the system guarantees that something that comes out of dialogue and cooperation is acceptable to the whole society.

The second principle is the respect of human rights. The idea behind human rights is a philosophical one which has its roots in Christianity. It means that all human beings are free, that they are equal and that every single person is as important as anyone else. Human beings must have freedom of speech. They must be able to say freely what they think. They must express their opinion. They must have the possibility to practice their religion. They are equal and they must not be discriminated because they belong to another ethnicity, to another religion or to another gender.

The third principle is the rule of law. Rule of law means that people must be treated equally by the courts. The same law must be applied to everybody. The judges should not be influenced by politics and they should not be influenced by money. They must be in a position to be free of pressure. They must not be afraid of losing their jobs when they do not act as certain people want them to. They must be professionally trained and they must have job security. All of this is also true for the public administration. This idea of the independence of judiciary and depolitization of the public administration is a topic which is discussed between the European Union and Macedonia in the enlargement process. The Government and the Parliament have adopted measures to make sure that the rule of law is respected or even more respected than before.

Market economy is the last principle. The idea at the heart of market economy is competition. In economy monopolistic structures are bad for the people. Imag-

ine if there was only one company with the license to import cars into Macedonia. The result would be that everybody would be obliged to buy that car. They would be bad and not cheap, but expensive. To secure competition, the conditions must be fair and transparent. There must be zero tolerance for corruption within the public administration. For example, in the case of a call for proposal to build a new bridge or a new road, the one who makes the best proposal should be given the chance to realize the project, and not the one who has good relations with the public administration.

All the necessary reforms, all these benchmarks – are not part of a kind of school exam where the European Union gives the mark, but they are in the interest of the people. It is in the interest of all of you. Sometimes I have the impression that people here think: “the European Union demands too much of us, it is never satisfied with what we do. We work so hard and the EU still criticizes saying that we are not good enough”. This is the picture I often meet when I talk to people, or when I look to the media. So I want to underline that it is in your own interest that all those reforms are carried through. If the European Union would not insist on those reforms, it would not be in the long run attractive for the people anymore. If we do not stick to those principles, we would not be the attractive club of countries we are now.

My last point is the role of civil society, which is very important. The whole reform process is not only

concern of the Government, but a concern of every citizen. The task is to build civil society. Civil society is a society directed by the idea of common goals, where people do not see so much the interest of their clan, of their ethnic group, of their personal interest. It is a society whose members are aware of something which is higher, more important, which is in the interest of the nation and its people. It is a society whose members refrain from following solely the position of the party, the clan or the ethnic group and instead they act in favour of the citizens and of the community as a whole. The main responsibilities are held by the politicians, those who are in power, those who are in government positions and in Parliament, or the administration. But they should know that the people, the citizens are aware and that they care about what they are doing and that they are ready to get involved and engaged. The public opinion can be and is a power in a country. The media also have an important role to play. They must be aware of what is going on and give politicians the idea that they are controlled; that what they are doing is monitored, analyzed, discussed and criticized. This is not important only for Macedonia, but for every country. In Germany, of course, we need press and media that are critical. In every country democracy needs citizens that are interested in politics, that discuss and criticize and get engaged in political parties or NGOs.

“Defining your vital interest will lead you to your Strategic Partners”

EMBASSY OF HUNGARY

H.E. Mr. Ferenc Kekesi,
Ambassador



Speaking of the European Union with all those special terms, phrases and all the policies and instruments, we realize that communication is one of the most difficult things in United Europe. Sometimes we think that we understand each other quite well, only to find out that we weren't right in thinking so. It is the role of all of us, politicians, civil society, ambassadors, experts to do whatever we can to help the communication and understanding of United Europe. It is in my country's interest to share our experience and try to bring EU closer to you. This is the way to improve our Hungarian-Macedonian partnership and help it become a Strategic Partnership.

When we cooperate, it means that we share common goals and develop projects in order to accomplish these goals. When we speak about a Strategic Partnership it means that we still share common goals and develop projects, but we also forge alliances to represent those common goals and argue for each other at various international forums. We do all this regardless of the political party in power and it is a long term partnership gaining both countries considerable benefits.

The Republics of Hungary and Macedonia nourish excellent ties and cooperate closely. The two countries do not have any kind of open issues. We are not neighboring countries but we are very close to each other, much closer than we think. In fact, in 1 hour you can

reach Budapest and find friends, partners. It is unfortunate that we don't use this proximity to a satisfactory level. We were part of a different political and economic system and we are now trying to build new ties. Although 20 years since the fall of the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall were not enough to achieve this, the same major goals that we share provide a good basis for cooperation to the level of Strategic Partnership.

For Hungary, both Macedonia and the region are very important. Our trade exchange with the region has been doubled in the last decade. The bilateral exchange of goods and economic cooperation has grown considerably and is still developing. The turnover of Hungarian companies in the region is gradually increasing. There is also good cooperation in the fields of education and culture. However, the most intense is our political cooperation, and is therefore much more visible in everyday life.

When we speak about strategic goals, the first thing we think about is integration in the Euro-Atlantic structures. Hungary is one of your major supporters in NATO and the EU. We would like to see the country as soon as possible in these organizations. This requires that all necessary basic requirements are met. The preparations are an endless process. Hungary joined EU and NATO, but reforms and reconstruction or development of the society and the economy are still go-



ing on. It is like a train that never stops. Macedonia needs to demonstrate firm dedication in the reform process. You need to strive to always improve in order to project the image of a country, desirable member, which is capable to face the challenges of membership. You have to lead both organisations to the belief that Macedonia's accession will make them not bigger, but stronger.

Stemming from our Strategic Partnership Hungary is trying to help Macedonia to become a good member and enjoy all benefits of membership. Knowing that in the European Union there are certain interest groups, and as we are both relatively small countries, we can call each other partners. We don't say that we

are friends, because it is obvious that we are friends. When vital issues arise, we are partners. Based on this I would say, that in most of the cases, for example agriculture, Hungary will be your partner rather than rival. There are millions of other areas where we can find potentials for developing strategic partnership and forge an alliance. Look at the example of the Višegrad Group. We forged an alliance with Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia on our way to the EU. That alliance helped us in the accession, and is still helping us today. Take Hungary, but also take the experience of all other new Member States analyze it and define your vital interests. Defining your vital interests will lead you to your Strategic Partners.

"The capacity and continuity of the civil servants is crucial for the negotiations' outcome"

INSTITUTE OF WORLD
ECONOMICS OF THE HAS¹

Kristina Vida Ph.D.,
Senior Research Fellow



My task for today is to present the Hungarian experience with negotiations for EU membership and to give you some ideas and maybe some advices on what to do and what not to do. First of all I would like to say that you should not despair because even for Hungary, a country considered to be one of the best prepared at the very beginning in the early 1990s, it took 10 years, or 14 years all in all. From the year of lodging the application for EU membership, which was in 1994, to actually becoming a member in 2004, 10 years passed. In a comparison to Macedonia we were a bit lucky since the EU started negotiations with Hungary several months after being granted the candidate status. So it is a bit different situation with Macedonia, but on the other hand we had to wait much longer for membership because the negotiations were more protracted than we thought or anticipated.

Hungary set itself a target date of 2002 for entering the EU. The target date did not materialize since we entered the EU in 2004, so it lasted 2 more years. Nevertheless, I think it was useful because the Hungarian preparations went according to these deadlines, since we did a lot of work in advance. Moreover, we got 2 more years which gave us more time to do even more adoption of the acquis and so on and so forth,

meaning also that we could draw much more derogation claims because we were ready by 2004. If things go slower, Macedonia can also think in these terms of gaining some more time for the preparations.

Secondly - the negotiations methodology. I think you will always have to cope with the EU's double approach. On one hand the EU will always tell you that it's evaluating you on your own individual merit. So, we are looking at Macedonian progress only and it is only your individual merit that counts. On the other hand, the EU will always be tempted to tackle especially smaller countries and even medium-size countries in a group. So, if for example, the situation in the Western Balkans improves faster than anticipated, you should be prepared that the EU might think that they can put you in the same basket.. It means that they would slow down your process a little bit so that the other countries can catch up a little bit. It is not a nice thing, but we have also experienced it because in the beginning we had 6 forerunners and 6 second-runner countries. We have to cope with this EU approach. The EU looks on the map and says: let's take up these countries together if possible. Nevertheless, we managed to cope with this double approach and we emerged.

Thirdly, you always have to keep in mind that the work amounting before you is always greater. In the southern

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enlargement, the new southern member-states had to adopt some 40,000 acquis pages of the European body of legislation; we had to adopt more than double, around 90,000 acquis pages and it's a bad news for you, you will have to cope with 120,000 acquis pages. Therefore, the sooner you enter the EU the better. Afterwards you will have to formulate the next pieces of legislation, whilst now you only have this unilateral adaptation.

Another advice would be that while you are negotiating and if you happen to negotiate in a basket with some other countries, especially with your neighbors, I would advise you to build coalitions. This is one thing that SEE countries didn't do and I think that it was a great mistake, that for example the Višegrad countries didn't present their common interest although they had many common interests. Maybe everybody was just focusing on their homework so we didn't look towards neighbours, what to do and how to present some key interests together. Bear in mind that you are always stronger when you present some key interests together with at least one more country than when you present it alone.

The preparations for negotiations were based on 4 pillars. First of all, Hungary was concentrating, and I'm sure that's the case in Macedonia, to establish the grounds for macroeconomic stability and sustainable long-term growth. That's very crucial. Secondly, we had to focus not only on the legal adaptation but also on setting up the proper institutions that would be viable also after accession. You also have to fill in these institutions with competent people so you have to train and retrain your civil servants all the time and in parallel with foreign languages. The forth pillar, one for which we are here today, is preparing the public for EU Accession. It's very crucial to bring the whole

process a little bit down among the people, among the citizens, because the European Union is also Union of the European citizens, so you have to know, you have to be involved as citizens. Starting from the early second half of the 1990s in Hungary we had different communication strategies thus keeping EU always on the agenda. Now I would like to point out some key elements about the negotiations.

Administration of the negotiations is key to success because if you have good, transparent institutional set-up with competent people and with a system that can work smoothly then it is already a great success. Once negotiations start it will be a huge everyday work that you will have to cope with. You will have to have prepared civil servants to do all that work. Don't despair that you're a smaller country and you will have smaller amount of staff involved, because we also have Cyprus and Malta, smaller countries which were negotiating very successfully. So do not care about the size of the staff which can also rise a little bit in that period, but concentrate on building up really transparent structure. In Hungary we chose the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and within the Ministry there was a State Secretariat for Integration and within it there was a General Department for EU Coordination. And that was really the heart of the system. So if you have one heart, one centre, be it in the MFA or in another Ministry, it doesn't matter, you should have one centre system.

We had 3 key persons in the negotiating delegation and I would like to highlight their personalities, as well. There was the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Head of the State Secretariat for European Integration, so the State Secretary, and there was also the Hungarian Chief Negotiator based in Brussels. These three people were not only highly competent; they were actually in-



involved in European matters since the mid 1980s. They were very well trained and successful career diplomats. They served in Brussels on the Mission, and then they came back and worked in the Ministries. One of them is actually a professor of European law. So these were extremely competent people, who were kept throughout the whole process. During the 10 years - from 1994 to 2004 - there was a personnel continuity which is a key issue. If you change your people all the time they have to start and restart again learning about how the EU functions and getting to know the personal contacts which are very, very crucial during such important negotiations, even if the Government changes in that period. There were at least two elections in that period and still these people were kept.

Although all three were excellent people, I would just like to mention one of them. I would like to highlight the Chief Negotiator, Endre Juhasz, who is now one of the judges of the European Court of Justice. He was known for his very vast knowledge of the European acquis and there were rumours that the Commissioners at the European Commission, the officials, the Eurocrats actually feared to negotiate with Mr. Juhasz

because he sometimes knew the acquis much better than the Eurocrats themselves.

We set ourselves three negotiating principles. We had the ministerial responsibility which meant that it was always up to the ministries to elaborate the sectoral items for the negotiating chapter. These sectoral items had to be coordinated across ministries, because you necessarily have conflicts across ministries. So these inter-ministerial, inter-sectoral conflicts were solved in the inter-ministerial forum. Thirdly, we had the single channel method according to which Hungary was always speaking with one voice to the EU. The Ministry would never just contact the Commission or the member-states without any coordination, it was always channelled through the Brussels-based Mission.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the Personnel capacities. Once again, you will need highly competent leading persons, preferably career diplomats who are very well familiar with the EU and what it is all about and secondly, keep the personnel continuity and then also have well trained civil servants who you should also remunerate properly and keep them on the spot.

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The next point of my discussion is the assessment of the chapters. We had 31 chapters and I think you will have already 35. Out of the 31 we had 29 acquis chapters to negotiate. Most of them were unproblematic. However, there were 11 tougher chapters from which I would highlight some. Chapter 30 would have been negotiated absolutely without any problems, but unfortunately due to a very unfair decision in Nice by the EU 15 we and the Czech Republic had a huge and sensitive problem. The problem was that both countries with population of 10 million were granted two seats less in the European Parliament. That problem was rectified in the last minute in Copenhagen. The conclusion is that you might encounter such unexpected problems you wouldn't think of at all in the whole process.

I don't want to go into details of the hard topics but some of them might be of interest for you because you might also encounter similar problems or claims for derogations. In environment, Hungary wanted to ask for 9 derogations and in the end we ended up with 4 derogations. The longest one will last until 2015 with the communal sewage systems which have to be installed everywhere in the country and these requires huge investments. These are so costly directives, that the country needs time to do the necessary investments. Secondly, free movement of capital. I would like to advise you on this. I'm sure land in Macedonia is cheap as it was in Hungary. Don't let yourself be pressured by fast liberalization of buying land. You can always point to old countries and you can always say to Brussels that the EU granted for example 7 years moratorium to the 10 new member-states in this chapter and ask the same derogation for yourself. I don't know about countries like Cyprus and Malta but to us the EU granted 7 years of moratorium on buying land which

can be extended in case of emergency by 3 years. So in total we were granted 10 years of moratorium for buying land because buying cheap land from Western Europeans can lead to great speculations and so on and so forth. So you can always point out our experience.

We also had some arguments on the budget. The budget item was the one I wanted to highlight when I mentioned that we didn't build coalitions with the V4 countries. What happened with the budget was that we were actually negotiating the budget in the very last moment in Copenhagen, in the last day, in the last night because it was very sensitive for the EU how much money we would get. Unfortunately the V4 countries didn't make any coalition so the EU was negotiating behind closed doors to each country individually. The outcome was that Hungary and the Czech Republic, countries with same population and similar levels of development, got different results. The Czechs got much more in the beginning as a kind of liquidity back up and support than the Hungarians. This happened because the EU could tell the negotiating diplomats in different rooms that the Czechs already accepted this amount, as well as the Polish. So be careful that the negotiations go on and don't stop until you say that it's OK and try to build coalitions.

The final outcome of the negotiations was that we got 34 derogations which is a kind of a middle range. There were countries which got more, countries which got less; maybe you should concentrate on asking for less derogation. Asking for fewer transitory arrangements can show the EU that you are well prepared. On the other side if you ask for a few derogations you should argument them well. You must show that they are really justified. Only then you will be granted those derogations.



In conclusion, we ended up with good budgetary position, especially from the year 2007 onwards, so we got annually at least 3% of our GDP from the EU. The institutional issue was settled but we had substantial losses regarding the agricultural quotas. This was especially the case with the milk and cattle quotas because we were very rich in cattle, in cows and in milk production but we couldn't negotiate these issues quite well. As a result Hungary is still suffering from the results of those negotiations today.

Hungary is whole-heartedly backing the integration of the whole region. In our case, it was actually Germany who was the main motor behind the whole process.

You need allies among the present member-states and the more you have, the better it is. Of course, Hungary or Slovakia are not enough so you should have more and more allies. Don't forget to make more publicity of your country because in some countries there will be referenda on next enlargements, so you also have to cope with that one too.

I would say that until the crisis, the five years of EU membership were really a successful period. First of all, there was macroeconomic stabilization for most of the countries. Hungary didn't perform well but I don't want to extend on that; all the other countries had excellent or quite good performance. Four countries out of 12

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already introduced the Euro, and that's also a success story. There was an intensification of trade relations among the new member-states because we already had good trade relations and were completely inter-related with the Western European markets, but we succeeded to increase substantially our regional trade which would be also beneficial here. Foreign direct investments from the old member-states kept on flowing into the region. A lot of new-member states' workers went to the West and that also didn't cause any trouble at all.

EU Membership had no painful impact on the budget. The old member-states had this fear that the "big bang" enlargement of 12 member-states would increase the budget. It didn't happen, it's still one percent of the EU GNI. Nevertheless, the new member-states managed to get their portion of at least 3% of GDP. So, everybody is well-off. We also had a substantial value added during these five years thanks to the EU budget. I would like to highlight that the EU is functioning well with 27 members - that was a big surprise for some. Therefore, one could always argue that if the EU can function well with 27 members then it can function with 30 countries as well, so it will not change things dramatically.

My concluding points or some advices to a new accession country like Macedonia would be to set up transparent institutional framework with an efficient

coordinating centre. Second, keep in mind the derogations that we got because you can always refer to these like precedents. Third, preserve all well trained civil servants in key positions. Fourth, stabilize your democracy and fight corruption because there was at least one case in the EU when the Commission suspended cohesion money to one of the new member-states due to corruption case. Don't lose any euro cent due to corruption; stabilize public finances and all fundamentals on the national economy in accordance to the Maastricht criteria.

I would suggest that you find some flagships of the economy, be it tourism or agriculture. Build up viable institutions that will be able to manage the day-to-day business with the EU also after the accession, because life doesn't end once you gain membership. On the contrary, train, retrain and remunerate properly your civil servants, otherwise they will go to the private sector and you will lose your well trained civil servants. Find the kind of national consensus on major EU issues, because then you will be a more credible partner to the EU, so try not to change your priorities every four years after elections. Learn how to build coalitions inside with your fellow members and of course share EU issues with the public continuously, just like we are doing today.

*“EU Negotiations are about **acquis**, but also about **money and politics**”*

CENTRE FOR
INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS

Prof. Bojko Bucar Ph.D.
Senior Researcher



Today I would like to share with you some thoughts on the pre-accession and accession period as well as on the membership experience of Slovenia. Talking about the pre-accession period, there are three points that I would like to make. First of all, in Slovenia we did a lot of studies on what would be the best way for Slovenia to develop as a state and its society. We investigated whether we should join the European Free Trade Area, the EU, or should we not join any integration at all and leave everything as it was, maybe create a kind of a duty-free zone etc. The results were that there may be no good or even best option, but membership in the EU seemed certainly the least bad option. So the conclusion was that Slovenia basically does not have another option but to join the Union. The second thing that happened even before accession negotiations with the EU started was that Slovenia had to change a lot of things in the area of economy, but also in the legal and the political system. Some people didn't believe that all the changes that were made were also good and so they started questioning these changes. The answer of the politicians, but also of the experts, was very clear: we are not doing these changes because of the European Union, but because we have to do them if we want to become a modern society that has a chance to develop. We have to follow the

model of other states in the European Union because they are those who are developed, who are modern. Therefore, we have to do the same if we want development, regardless of the European Union. Reforms are made because Slovenia needs those changes, not because of the European Union. The third thing that we experienced was that one of the Member States - Italy, and this will be probably very familiar to you - didn't want to give its consent for opening the accession negotiations unless Slovenia opened its real estate market. Slovenia knew that it would have to do it when joining the EU, yet many politicians and the general public didn't understand why it would have to be done even before the negotiations had started. It just seemed discriminatory. But noting helped. The result was that before Slovenia could start the accession negotiations, it had to change its Constitution according to the changes that were demanded. Finally, after Slovenia did what was demanded, it could start the accession negotiations.

This is when the circus actually began. It is often said that accession negotiations are about the **acquis**, that each country has to accept. It is said that there are virtually no negotiations and that the European Union is only monitoring whether the country is fulfilling the standards of the **acquis** or not. And that it is basically a dictate by the European Union, although



of course one has to point out that in the negotiation process transitional periods and derogations may be granted. Maybe not many, but nevertheless they may be important for the country. The country needs to have a very good and experienced negotiating team because negotiations are not just about the transformation of the *acquis* into the national legislation. Speaking about a good negotiation team, I have to point out that Slovenia had a very good negotiating team. It was led by the chief negotiator, Dr. Janez Potocnik, who is now the Commissioner for Science and Research. The negotiating team was not negotiating only with the European Union, but they were also negotiating with the National Government, with the political forces in the country and even with the civil society. So, it was a much more complicated business than just negotiating with the European Union.

There were lots of political activities during the accession process, but I would like to single out one thing in particular and that is the flow of information. On the

Internet you could follow not only the positions that Slovenia had in the negotiation process but also the results for each Chapter individually. So, the experts could, if they wanted to, follow the whole process rather closely. But it wasn't just the Internet. If the farmers in a remote village were concerned about the price of milk or potatoes, someone from the negotiating team, often even the chief negotiator, Dr. Potocnik, went there and explained the whole process. Whenever someone thought they should come and explain things, there they were. We used to joke saying that if you went to a store and bought a tin, when you'd open it, Dr. Potocnik would jump out of it and on top of it he would even be friendly.

As I mentioned before, the negotiations were said to be all about the *acquis*. This is however only partly true. The negotiations are also about two other things, one of them is money and the other one is politics. Let me give you a few examples. Firstly, in the Chapter on Financial and Budgetary Provisions Slovenia had to

struggle with the tendency that it would become a net payer into the EU budget as a result of a statistical effect. So many East European countries have joined at the same time that suddenly Slovenia was considered a developed country. Because its GDP was over half of the average GDP of the European Union, Slovenia should become a net contributor. At the end a political solution has been found. This, however, only goes for the current financial perspective. Secondly, the issue on regional policy was also an issue of money. Slovenia wanted to have two or three regions but the European Commission insisted on having only one region. And that makes a big difference, of course. If there was only one region, it would be a developed one and the amount of eligible funds would be reduced. But dividing the country in more regions would mean that some of them would be considered underdeveloped and would be eligible for more funds from the richest funds in the European Union. The third issue that had to do with money was the Common Agricultural Policy, a Chapter that I believe will be very important for Macedonia. The European Union didn't allow the newcomers to fall under the same regime as the old states when it comes to farmers' subsidies. Slovenia managed to reach a compromise in the sense that it could subsidize its farmers to the same amount as old Member States, but it has to subsidize the farmers partly from its own budget. Anyway, this was considered a success. And I guess it was a success.

The other thing that plays a role in the negotiations is pure politics. Every acceding country has to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria but these are so vague that politics comes into play again and again. For example, when Slovenia opened its real estate market, it included a reciprocity clause that could protect it, a restriction similar to what Italy and Greece had. But the

Commission told it that it had to remove this clause, because of the two basic principles of the Treaty of the European Community: prohibition of discrimination, whereby citizens of other Member States may not be treated differently than own citizens; and secondly, the unconditional nature of the Treaty which means rights conferred by the Treaty are unconditional and parties to the Treaty cannot make them subject to a condition. Their argument was that Slovenia, in comparison with other East European acceding countries, was one of the more developed, so they could allow transitional periods for them but not for Slovenia.

When it came to the Free Movement of Persons, Slovenia asked to have free access to the labor market. The argument was the principle of prohibition of discrimination and unconditionality of the Treaty. This time however, the Commission claimed that Slovenia was underdeveloped and eventually forced the transitional period on it, just like on the rest of the Eastern European countries; only Cyprus and Malta were granted immediate access to the labour market, because they were considered developed countries. Slovenians were perplexed with this difference of treatment. Once Slovenia was considered a more developed and the second time a less developed country. This, I guess, is a little bit of politics.

Of course, there were other instances that could be cited, like the demands from Italy and Austria against Slovenia but not against other accession countries, to close her duty-free shops on the land borders. Slovenia was aware that it will eventually have to close them after becoming a member of the European Union, but why before? On the other hand, Austria imposed certain restrictions on the import of tobacco and Italy lowered the prices of gasoline at the border. Slovenia complained because it didn't want to close her duty-

free shops, and claimed that what Austria did was not in compliance with international law and that Italy's action meant disrespect of the common market. On Slovenia's complaints no answer came from the Commission. The only answer that Slovenia received was that it has to close the duty-free shops. And it did it.

Basically what the Commission was saying was that, as a general rule, applicants express their interest to join the EU, and not the other way around. Furthermore, there are some other peculiarities. The Schengen regime and the Euro-zone are *acquis* for all newcomers, whereas not all old members have to be members of the Schengen zone or of the Euro-zone. These are simply the rules of the club. When Slovenia joined the Union, it had not met all Copenhagen criteria and the Maastricht criteria that are required for the Euro-zone. Nevertheless, again it was a little bit of a political decision to take it and the others aboard and grant them a transitional period. But to enter the Euro-zone a country has to be very strict in completing the Maastricht criteria although some of the old Member States are not that strict in keeping to the Maastricht criteria. That's how things go. I have been talking all this only because I think it should soothe a little bit all those who fear that Macedonia is maybe discriminated in the demands and that it would not be in the same position as other countries. When I was talking about what I told you today on a conference in Vienna, with professors from all old Member States, the message that I got back was: welcome to the club, which meant that they all have their own stories to tell.

And so Slovenia finally joined the European Union. Curiously enough, nothing happened. Nothing changed in people's lives. Why? Because Slovenia initially stayed out of the Euro-zone and out of the Schengen Information System. People only started

noticing some changes when Slovenia had joined the Euro and the Schengen zone. The Euro was well accepted, mainly because people don't have to change the money anymore while travelling to most EU countries; besides, Slovenia had had her own currency for a relatively short period of time. Also, people are now able to compare prices and salaries, which has raised demands for a rise in salaries. But the biggest impact of the introduction of the Euro was the considerable rise in prices. The Government claimed that there were other economic factors at play, but people simply noticed that with the Euro everything was much more expensive. And if you talk to the Italians, the Austrians, the Germans, they all nod and say "yes, when we introduced the euro everything became much more expensive". Nevertheless, people like the Euro and they appreciate the benefits that the Euro brings them.

The other big impact was the Schengen Information System. There were concerns especially from those who have close ties with countries that are outside the Schengen Information System. For example, many tourist agents complained that Russian tourists face too many difficulties to come to Slovenia; the same thing became true for the citizens of ex-Yugoslav republics. These people claim that the Schengen system is not a good system. It is supposed to be for the crooks, but the crooks don't use border control. Border control is only for honest people and they have problems entering the country; crime always evades border controls. Nevertheless, I think people in general are satisfied with the Schengen Information System.

In the issue of the free movement of the labour force we still don't feel all the effects. What we are slowly noticing of course is that there is an influx of the labor force basically from the once East European countries. This doesn't cause problems yet, but we will



have to wait and see what happens. Maybe some problems will arise. We noticed that there is an influx of homeless people from certain countries and that the activities of organized crime have risen. But real challenge lies ahead once the position of the old Member States will change and once there will be a complete liberalization with old Member States. What might happen, but I'm not sure if it will, is that we will get an influx of a more qualified working force on the one hand and that we will have a brain drain on the other. If this will happen it remains to be seen what in the future the wisdom of our politicians will be to counteract this phenomenon.

The last thing that I wanted to stress was the power of the Commission and the power of the European Court of Justice. This is not so widely known except among the interested public. I think that the European Union is doing a very bad job in something I would call an outreach program. So, when we arrive at a problem with the European Commission, the national media report on what is going on, but they report more or less on the one side of the story, the side of the Government. They do not report about the other side of the story which is the side of the European Union, of the Commission or of the Court. I may point out that this is not a peculiarity of Slovenia. It is a peculiarity of every state in the European Union. Once a measure is taken to the benefit of the people, the Government always takes the credit for it. Whenever there is a measure that is not so popular with the people, they say: that's the European Union and we had to do it. So, the picture of the EU in the public gets a little bit distorted.

I have to say one more thing: support for the European Union has fallen in Slovenia. At the beginning of the accession process it was between 80 and 90%; we had practically a complete consensus. Now it has fallen to between 53 and 63%. Nevertheless, I would say that people are in general satisfied that their country is in the European Union because they seem to feel to be better-off than outside the European Union. If this will change in times of crisis remains to be seen. The experts will surely say that if you would be outside the European Union, the crisis would have hit the country much harder. The interested public is happy also that the state is in the European Union because the national government and the state are subject to rules and regulations that are common to most European states. Those rules and regulations are monitored from outside, which is a very good thing. Autonomous national policies in conjunction with all the transitional peculiarities do not always bring optimal results. The interested public would be rather concerned if the politicians would have completely free hands in passing whatever laws it would please them. So, the membership in the EU, regardless of the thorny path that you have ahead, and regardless of the uncomfortable position that you are in after you join the Union, membership is still the least uncomfortable position of European states and their societies if you compare it to other options. So I hope that Macedonia will start accession negotiations as soon as possible, maybe this year and that it will also conclude them as quickly as possible and that it will be welcomed aboard the European Union.

"The longer we wait, the more work to be done"

MACEDONIAN CENTER FOR
EUROPEAN TRAINING

Natasa Jovanova MES,
Program Director



Thinking on today's debate, several issues were raised that I would like to share with you in hope that they might provoke your reflections and comments and would contribute to our ultimate goal - EU membership.

The first issue I raised was the one related to public information. Namely, how many Macedonian citizens are truly informed on the European Union, its bodies and institutions, the manner of operation, what does "European conditions, criteria and benchmarks" mean, what is their position in regard to the European Union, what are the benefits and the disadvantages of the accession, etc. Equally important is the information of citizens on Macedonia's accession process in the EU, how does it take place, i.e., what is the progress made by Macedonia in that regard, etc.

Amazing is the fact that such a long-run strategic goal and the first priority of the Macedonian state, which enjoys an extremely high, almost consensual support by all political parties and citizens, is treated in an unserious and irresponsible manner. Evidence thereof can be found in the failure of the state to allocate relevant funds for the promotion of this goal. Information is not disbursed on essential developments concerning the state's progress. Unfortunately, even the media provide scarce information on EU-related issues. Noticeable is also the great imprecision that

occasionally borders with partial or often contradictory coverage of the integration processes. As a result citizens - who according to all public surveys show high support for the EU integration - are actually little informed on EU-related issues. Particular "controversies" exist in regard to our "European" story.

Macedonia's accession in the European Union is not and must not be high level politics, or merely a foreign policy, or even business of a handful of politicians happening at their cabinets and behind closed doors. On the contrary, the European integration is an internal policy of Macedonia and an issue of vital interest for all its citizens. The state Macedonia is not becoming a member of EU, but rather the citizens of Macedonia will become citizens of the EU. Therefore - in my opinion - if we are to accelerate the integration process and enjoy the positive benefits it brings, while avoiding the negative implications, it is necessary for the entire public to be actively involved in the process. Only well-informed citizens can provide their optimal contribution. Our state has long adopted the Strategy on Public Information and Communication concerning the integration process, which is primarily implemented by the Secretariat for European Affairs (SEA). However, for some time now, on SEA's website one cannot find the common monthly briefs that provide information on the progress made and the related impor-



tant documents. The documents available on the said website are old, whereas most of the strategic documents concerning the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance and Community Programs have not been translated into Macedonian language. The Operational Programs to the Strategy that are to include annual activities and measures for its implementation have not been adopted for some time now. The Ministries, as the holders of the process, provide scarce, superficial or no information on their progress achieved in the said process. Broad, comprehensive campaigns in the printed and broadcasting media that would provide continuous, thorough and transparent information for the Macedonian public on the European integration process do not exist at all. The anticipated brochures, leaflets and bulletins, the Eurobus (mobile EU library), other printed, audio and video materials as information dissemination tools are no longer developed. The same goes for the information days intended for particular stakeholders. The ignorant attitude towards the

expert and interested public, whose capacity and zest can be used in the process, is an additional problem. Instead of a broad and all-encompassing consultation process, the one implemented provides restrictive and utterly selective approach, thus reducing it to mere form.

The second information-related issue concerns the so called absorption capacity of the state, i.e., the ability and preparedness to use the pre-accession assistance from EU, which is to facilitate and step up the transition of the Republic of Macedonia from a candidate-country into a Member State. When talking about EU's pre-accession assistance, one refers to the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), which supports the preparations and the institutional building necessary for the future participation in the EU's Structural and Cohesion Funds. Additional funding source are the so called Community Programs – EU's financial programs that support the cooperation of Member States under various policies, such as the

employment policy, innovations, youth, culture, education, research and development, etc.

One of them is the "Europe for Citizens" Program, with a budget of 215 million EUR, which as of 19th March 2009 became available for the Republic of Macedonia. The Program promotes European citizenship by supporting activities of local organizations and citizens, but unfortunately has not been mentioned on the line ministry's website (Ministry of Education and Science). On the other hand, ZELS (the Association of Local Self-Government Units) provides information on the Program by posting information related to a meeting held abroad. The media also failed in promoting the program in front of relevant stakeholder organizations. Any success from the program is unlikely, if citizens are not informed on its existence, the possibilities it offers and the manner of benefiting from the Program. Other Community Programs include the Competitiveness and Innovation Program (CIP) intended to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (with a budget of 3.7 million EUR), the Seventh Framework Program for Research and Development (50.5 billion EUR), Life-Long Learning (6.97 billion EUR.) and Youth in Action (855 million EUR).

Lack of information and capacity is particularly worrying knowing the fact that EU funds are spent under transparent, but rather complicated rules and procedures. That is why the phase of EU accession is nothing less but a phase of preparations for EU membership. Our success as a future full-fledged member will depend on our current efforts made both on central and local level. This means that we endanger our success by "rushing" into matters not fully prepared, without utilizing all the possibilities and accepting what is offered, or to quote one of SEA's brochures: "if we do not fight to get what we want, we would have to want what we get."

The third issue is related to the accession negotiations. It is a long, utterly complex and difficult process that takes place on several levels and requires full mobilization of the entire society. The fast start of negotiations is especially important knowing that EU is a dynamic organization that continuously grows, develops and advances. In other words, this implies growth of the number of policies and areas in which the EU is engaged, and utterly, the growth of the number of legislative acts translated into chapters for which we are to engage in negotiations. This means that the longer we wait, the more work is to be done. The more distant we are from the EU, the lesser our chances are to impact its policies. This is why negotiations and EU membership should happen today, and not tomorrow.

In October, Macedonia obtained the four-years due recommendation for opening accession negotiations issued by the European Commission, only after it fulfilled the eight benchmarks from the Accession Partnership, which is a key document that defines the short- and long-term priorities - 180 in total. As Macedonia has many obligations to fulfill, it should work diligently. However, the current dynamics does not suffice - if it took 3 years to fulfill the eight tasks, we would need 6 decades to complete the other 180 tasks. How much time will we need to complete the tasks required for full-fledged membership, I wonder?!

From a simplified perspective, the negotiations will proceed in the following manner: after we get the green light to start the negotiations, the European Commission will first undertake the "screening process", which is a procedure to determine the degree of (non)alignment of the national legislation with the EU acquis, by chapters. This process might last up to 12 months. Then the EC prepares a report and distributes it to Member States so that they can prepare their ne-

gotiation positions for each chapter, based on which the EC prepares the joint negotiation position. Prior to initiating the accession negotiations, Macedonia will also need to develop its negotiation positions. As negotiations with the EU are not conventional negotiations, it will be of vital importance for the state to have developed quality negotiation positions. This, on the other hand, requires Macedonia to be well knowledgeable of the situation in the relevant areas so as to be able to anticipate the timeframe and financial means necessary for achieving full alignment with the European norms and standards. The process of developing the negotiation positions by Macedonia and EU might take up to 6 months. Actual negotiations are led pursuant to previously set benchmarks for opening and closing the chapters. The average length of negotiations moves from four to six years. Therefore,

if Macedonia obtains the date this year, under the best scenario, the negotiations would end in 2015 and Macedonia can hope for membership in 2016, after the ratification of the Accession Treaty by all 27 Member States (28 with Croatia).

Since good preparations for the negotiations and the quality of developed positions will determine the quality of the solutions that we will get for the future, it is absolutely necessary for the Government, in addition to the necessary institutional set up, to lead the process under maximum openness, transparency and to involve all societal actors. The better the preparation of the stakeholders, the “smoother” the transition of Macedonia into membership will be.

I hope that our campaign “Action for Europe” will give its contribution to the attainment of that goal.



“I’m here to help forge a friendship between our countries and people”

LIAISON OFFICE OF THE
HELLENIC REPUBLIC

H.E. Mrs. Alexandra Papadopoulou,
Ambassador,
Head of the Liaison Office



We read in the newspapers and hear from politicians here about the prospect of joining the European Union and it sounds very good. It is good and it is promising, but it is not an easy path. I am old enough to know Greece before we joined the Union. The difference is huge and it is not only in economic terms, although we often hear only about the economic benefits. For me the most important development happened on social level and the changes it brought to people’s mentality. The road towards the European Union was not easy for my country and of course it did not happen overnight. It was a long process that lasted for a couple of decades and its results are amazing. However, it took a great deal of effort to change the mentality of the Greek people, to open our horizons and transform our society into a more tolerant and modern one.

I would like to focus more on the partnership between our two countries – a partnership that goes beyond the European project, but is crucial for your European perspective and for the future of our region. The citizens of Gevgelija and the Greek citizens on the other side of the border are a good example of this partnership. It is an illustration of how close we are and at the same time how far we can go together. As a first step, our partnership is an economic one, and it started with your independence 18 years ago.

It was modest at the beginning and it grew considerably after the Interim Accord. The economic relations between the two countries are developing on different levels: direct investments from the private sector; development assistance from the Greek government; trans-border cooperation through IPA programs; and the Greek Assistance for the Reconstruction of the Balkans. This is a regional project, of which your country is a partner that seeks to direct investments to the entire region with specific measures.

When it comes to direct private investment, Greece is the largest foreign investor in your country. The capital that Greek companies have invested amounts to around 1 billion euro and the people that are employed directly by Greek companies are over 20.000. The areas in which these investments were made are of strategic importance for every country: energy, telecommunications, and the banking sector and, of course, trade and manufacturing of textile. The Greek economic presence in this country has been uninterrupted even at delicate times such as the events of 2001. The economic relations between us have not been affected by political issues and businessmen on both sides of the border work in politics-free environment.

The Greek development assistance is channeled through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and it focuses on areas with broader social impact, such as support-



ing SMEs, creating projects in small communities with bigger social needs, building or repairing schools, supporting people to start their own businesses or to get education in areas like new technologies. Large part of the assistance is designated for environmental projects which are particularly important since we have a common border and, thus, share areas of great environmental significance. The lakes Dojran and Prespa and the Vardar/Axios River are our common natural heritage and we are both responsible for their preservation for future generations.

Part of the European integration process is to bring people together. The cooperation between municipalities is essential for achieving this goal. Every day people must find a way to cooperate, because we have common interests, therefore it is important to work very well on the local level and push for projects that bring benefits to all. This is where good cooperation and good neighborly relations start and where they are based. Municipalities on both sides of the border have done a very good job presenting programs for European funding. When it comes to cross-border cooperation our countries have achieved remarkable progress but there is still a lot more to be done.

The overall conclusion is that when we entered Eu-

rope, one of the things that we had to learn was to change our mindset. We are all different and we all have different opinions over the same issues, but this becomes secondary. More important is to learn from each other, to share experiences and help each other. What brings us together becomes the main focus of our efforts. We are neighbors and we lived together for years and years and we should continue to live together. We cannot change geography and we do not want to change geography. We are very happy with our neighbors. In Greece this is a lesson that we had to learn - to accept our neighbors and live with them. It is a long process. This is something that everyone has to achieve on their way to the European Union. If we start to do that on our own we are one step ahead of times and history. I am sure that we have a great future together and I am sure that the good cooperation that exists now between Gevgelija and other cities will expand. I want to assure you that on your way to the European Union, Greece will be your partner. Our countries have a strategic partnership. We are determined to help you on this path. We are all aware of the differences between us, but there is no need to talk about them now, in this context. I'm here to help forge a friendship between our countries and our people.

“Most of the fears about the European Union are nothing more than prejudices”

EUROPEAN INSTITUTE
IN LODZ
Kazimierz Sobotka Ph.D.,
Director General



Poland passed a long way to the European Union. We started in 1994 - the year when we signed the European Agreement, which was the document that opened our road to the European Union. It was a document on the basis of which Poland was associated with the European Union. The end of our road was in 2004 when we finally become an EU member. Today, we celebrate 5 years of our membership in the European Union.

Poland is a unitary state, with population of about 38 million. Our political system is presidential parliamentary democracy and our Parliament is bicameral - Common Chamber and Senate. Since the end of the communist system in 1989, Poland underwent double transformation - it turned its political and economic system into stable democracy, pre-market economy and adapted its laws and institutions to EU standards. Additionally, the prospect of EU membership and the increased awareness of the need for stronger self-governmental structure led to reforms on regional level. Consequently, Poland reformed the administration. In Poland we have very strong regional and local authorities. The reform of the state was based on the Territorial Self-Government Act from 1919, when gminas (local self-governments) and provinces (voivodships) were established. We have 16 voivodships, 373 counties (powiaty) and 2,489 communes (gminas). Poland's

accession to the EU was an ultimate effect of the entire process of transition of the economy and of the political system of the country.

The 10-years long accession process was accompanied with certain fears. First of all, people discussing the future membership of Poland complained that after our membership Polish enterprises would collapse, the land would be purchased excessively by Germans and other foreigners and we would lose our identity. Even though 5 years have passed from our accession, such fears persist. The latest are that the European Union will make us accept homosexual marriages and other immoral attitudes and behaviours. Nevertheless, we should remember that the European Union has no competences in the field of moral and morality. It is within the competence of national countries. These fears were some of the strongest reasons why the Euro-skeptics were not keen to support our accession to the European Union.

Obviously, there are many misunderstandings vis-à-vis the competences of the European Union. Today, one can see that the purchase of lands by foreigners is marginal. Poland remains a sovereign state with its unique both national and cultural identity. Polish agricultural products are competitive and Polish farms still exist. So, such fears were actually stereotypes without any strong background or any serious arguments.



Within the transition period Poland received pre-accession assistance through the instruments PHARE, ISPA and SAPARD. I think that Macedonia also profited from these programs.

I would like to present some results of our 5 years membership in the European Union. First of all let us observe the macro-economic results. The influence of our membership in the European Union and European funds contributed to serious increase of our national income and our GDP rate. We received direct financial transfers in large amounts. Just to give you an idea of the size of the money pot, I will tell you that in the years 2004-2006 the transfers reached 12 billion EUR. In the new 2007-2013 budget perspective of the EU Poland will receive 68 billion EUR. It is a very serious assistance which moved our economy towards becoming one of the best in the European Union. Even more, Poland is the only Member State that has quite good economic outlook, even in the midst of the global crisis. This is, in fact, among others factors, a result of

the membership in the European Union, result of receiving very, very serious assistance.

Other elements of Polish success concern the trade balance and the direct investments in our economy. After membership, we observed very huge flow of foreign investments into our economy. Agriculture is also the field where we can observe very serious influence of our EU membership. I already said that before our accession to the European Union, Polish peasants were Euro-skeptics because they were afraid that the land would be bought by foreigners and our agricultural products would not be competitive compared to European Union's products. Nowadays our products are very competitive and the peasants receive direct payments from the European Union. As a result, the Polish peasants became Euro-enthusiasts. Therefore, the change of the mentality, the change of opinion among the inhabitants of villages is very big.

Micro-economic perspective is also very important because before accession the small businessmen were

also afraid that their firms would not be competitive enough for the EU market. Now the small and medium enterprises are doing very well and can face the competition vis-a-vis older EU Member States.

What is the political perspective? In the field of politics the membership in the European Union is also successful. Poland is one of the serious players in the forum of European Union politics, and in foreign policy as well. One of the biggest successes of the Polish diplomacy and Polish politicians is the establishment of the Eastern Partnership. It is the result of the activity of the Swedish, Czech and Polish diplomacy. This Eastern Partnership encompasses 6 Eastern European countries, and Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Poland is one of the biggest promoters of the assistance for those countries and of their future membership in the European Union.

What is the social perspective? The social perspective is also positive, especially in regard to the labour market and migration. Labour market was very successful in the first years of our membership; in 2007 our unemployment rate decreased to 9 or 8 %. Also during the global crisis, our unemployment is lower than in other EU Member States. Now it is about 11%, and we hope we will keep it at this level. After we joined the European Union many Polish people immi-

grated to Western Europe, mainly to Ireland and Great Britain. Sometimes when we joke, we say that London is the 16th Polish voyvodship, because of the huge immigration to London.

What is Poland's public opinion vis-à-vis our membership in the European Union? In April 2009, one institute conducted public opinion research asking the following question: if on Sunday a referendum is to be held on Poland's accession to the European Union, would you vote "for" or "against" this accession? According to TNSOBOP (one of the most famous pollin organization in Poland) the acceptance of the membership in the European Union reached amazing an 90%. The Polish society is now one of the most pro-European societies. The results of the poll indicate that farmers' acceptance of the European Union increases every year. Today their support of membership stands at 70%. It is a quite high level of acceptance. Managers and students are the biggest pro-Europeans. In general, the younger generations are more pro-European. Another question asked was whether the accession of Poland to the EU was beneficial, rather beneficial or not favourable. Answers indicating "rather beneficial" are increasing every year.

In conclusion, we can say that our population and our society are persuaded that membership in the European



Union was beneficial for our country. The next question asked was about the Poland's position in the EU: 64% of answers indicated that we have a position of moderate influence in the EU, and 27% of our population answered that our position is very strong and influential.

What about our identity? Our society is very religious. Within the European Union, Poland, Malta and Ireland are the most religious societies. Even after 5 years of membership our religiosity did not decrease. So, it is not true that the membership in the European Union will diminish the religious character of the society. The same is valid for patriotism, which is still on the same level. What is the attitude of Poles and Europeans towards work? Before the accession, our citizens believed that Europeans are better workers and we are too lazy. After 5 years of membership, and mainly due to the huge immigration to Western Europe, 80% of the cases we are persuaded that we are good workers. So, our identity improved and we are proud that we are very good workers. Polish workers now have very good image and standing in Great Britain, Ireland and other host countries.

Unfortunately, information on European issues is not readily available. Even after 5 years, we see that we should inform more about the European Union and the European integration. Still we should not worry too much. When Commissioner Verheugen visited our Institute in Lodz, I complained to his assistant that our

civil society is not so well informed about the European Union. He answered - don't worry about it, because my mother-in-law asked me: where are you employed? "I am employed in the European Commission". "Yes, yes, the European Commission is in Nice, in France." So, we all have a lot to do. Information, information and information. If we do not know what the European Union is, we will be dominated by fears like the ones I mentioned earlier. The last issue I would like to mention is the answer to the question - what are the opportunities and what are the threats for the future of the EU. One very interesting answer about the future threats for the Union was the problem with the increase of nationalisms and of xenophobic attitudes. Europe, according to the idea of the EU fathers, was to be an integrated continent, without chauvinism, without nationalism, which is maybe too idealistic. I think that Europe has a great chance to be the continent of peaceful cooperation and peaceful life of all societies.

Poland is one of the countries that very strongly supports the accession of new countries. We support new enlargements. We support the future membership of Ukraine, Belarus and of the Balkan countries. So, if any European country wants to have a partner to be future candidate it should address Poland. We are very pro-European and we are hoping to see a very large Union comprised of the whole continent.

*“A wise political party puts
aside the excess of political talk
for the benefit of its country”*

GREEK CENTRE OF
EUROPEAN STUDIES
AND RESEARCH

Nikos Frangakis,
Advocate, President of
the Board of Directors



The first “European” experience of Greece was in the beginning of the 1960s, when Greece became the first country to apply and obtain a special status with the then European Communities. Had it not been for the dictatorship that started in 1967 this relationship would have developed smoothly. The 1970s were crucial period for Southern Europe in general; in this period we witnessed the fall of three dictatorships in Greece, Spain and Portugal. As early as 1975, Konstantinos Karamanlis, the then Prime Minister of Greece, insisted on the acceleration of the European agenda and that Greece should immediately apply for full membership. His vision at that time, shared by the majority of Greeks, was that joining the European Economic Community was essential for the consolidation of democracy in the country and also for building a feeling of European belonging. Obviously, the economic considerations were very important as well. But in economic terms, Greece was not ready for accession at that time and it is important to remember that the Report on the Greek candidacy by the European Commission was very cautious, almost a negative one.

If the Council of Ministers had followed the suggestion of the Commission, the Greek accession would have been delayed considerably, especially because at that time there were strong voices in Europe that the

three southern countries should accede at the same time. This would have been very negative for Greece because on one hand Greece would have had to wait for an additional 3 or 4 years, and, on the other hand, the terms of accession would have been balanced within the three countries which would have been to the detriment of Greece. Karamanlis’ efforts were backed by the European leaders of that time, especially by the French President, Giscard D’Estaing, and the German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. As a result, the Accession Treaty was signed in 1979 and membership was initiated on the 1st January 1981.

Accession to the EEC however was not consensual in Greek society due mainly to the fact that the political party in opposition, PASOK, was strongly against it. So when Andreas Papandreou (of PASOK) became Prime Minister in October 1981, the political program of the government included a referendum and pre-viewed whole-scale real negotiations and the strong possibility of reversing accession. Fortunately, once the Papandreou Government took office the approach towards Brussels took a U-turn, which is not unusual in politics, and the new government adopted a very pragmatic position towards the EC. The first sign of this pragmatism was seen when the Greek Government submitted to the Commission a memorandum with several points of re-negotiating particular provisions



of the Accession Treaty. At that stage the European Economic Community did not wish to jeopardize something that was perceived as a democratic achievement: to bring into the European family a country that had just overthrown a dictatorship regime. Let's not forget that Greece became the 10th member state in what was only the second enlargement. Therefore, whatever requirements the memorandum incorporated, they were all adopted and financially channelled, in particular through the Structural funds.

At that point in time, the fact that Greece had precedence over the Iberians was of considerable importance. This gave Greece the opportunity to establish agreements that 2 or 3 years later would have been impossible, due to the reallocation of funds because of the following enlargement that included Portugal and Spain. To elaborate more on this, the enlargement with the United Kingdom and Denmark, or the enlargement with the Scandinavian countries and Austria was a "linear enlargement", and the financial questions were of minor importance. These were all rather developed countries, with a good social policy and higher level of protection of human rights than the

average EEC. Therefore, their fears were not concerning the financial impact of joining, but the impact that enlargement would have on these areas. This leads to the emergence of Euro-scepticism among the Britons and the Danes.

On the other hand, other enlargements like the second enlargement with Greece, the third enlargement with Spain and Portugal and the big bang of 2004 were of a different kind. They meant a big leap forward. They were political decisions. They left aside the very important financial and economic problems. This was all in order to achieve certain political goals. We talked before about the fall of the dictatorships in the 1970s. We had the big bang of 2004 as a slow aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Block. These political considerations allowed Greece to re-negotiate the terms of financial assistance with subsequent enlargements. The Greek-Franco-Italian Alliance assured a fair share of financial assistance for the South. Afterwards, with the Economic and Social Cohesion Program the South of Europe was again financially assisted despite the reaction of the Nordic countries. Finally, when the Spaniards and the Portuguese joined,



Arnhildur
Halfadottir



the Greeks had again the opportunity to negotiate the terms. A financially beneficial atmosphere for all the southern countries was created. This, of course, meant that once more Greece used the opportunity to take for itself as much as possible.

What I'm trying to send across is that once you are in, and you've learned how to play the negotiation game, with every next enlargement you can gain new benefits. At the end of the day, obtaining benefits is what counts. Greece that we remember from before accession has nothing to do with Greece of today in terms of prosperity and development. All this was already obvious by the end of the 1980s. One could see that the situation had changed rapidly.

This is something that you should always keep in mind. When negotiating the country's accession you must do it vehemently. It is more challenging when it is not the case of the "linear enlargement" that I mentioned before, but rather a case of a political boost. This was seen in 2004; why not experience it again in the future? Why not have another big bang in the future? If we don't have a big bang, then the difficulty

and the obstacles on the way could be bigger. You see what's happening with Croatia: who would have imagined 3 years ago that the Croatian candidacy would be so much delayed? And yet it is, because of the obstacles. The important thing for a country is how to move from being part of a problem to becoming part of the solution.

Once a country becomes a Member State, it has the tools, and the possibilities to forge alliances for a better future. I stress "alliances" as this was the case of Greece. Greece knew how to take advantage of its place. It was the case in the Community of 10. The same was repeated in the Community of the 12, as it was in the Community of the 15. It was again the case in the Community of the 25, and is now in the Community of 27. One must realize that to have maximalist expectations is not the best way. The example of the PASOK re-negotiations back in 1981 shows exactly this. It demonstrates the wisdom of a political party that once it became Government, put aside the excess of the political speech in order to try and put things together for the benefit of the country.

“By sharing sovereignty to a limited extent, we gained real sovereignty”

**IRISH INSTITUTE FOR
INTERNATIONAL AND
EUROPEAN AFFAIRS**

Andrew O'Rourke,
Former Ambassador to the EU,
Chair - Enlargement Group



After centuries of troubled history Ireland became independent from Britain in 1921. We had a relatively poor, agricultural economy and very little industry. We made whisky, beer, clothing, biscuits and a few other things, and that was about all. Our infrastructure was very poor, roads were very bad. I saw some today which brought me back to my childhood. We had no raw materials. For over a century we had the highest emigration rate in Europe. The three following decades were a really bad period for growth. The 20s were a post-war period; in the 30s we had the great depression, in the 40s the Great War. In the 50s a recovery began. America helped at that time, in starting off the recovery of Europe. We in Ireland tried to develop industries behind tariff walls and hoped that they would succeed and supply the home market. However there was no chance of exports. There was some progress but it was not enough to provide sufficient jobs. Emigration and unemployment continued at a very heavy rate.

When the prospect of membership in the European Economic Community opened up in the mid 60s, we were heavily dependent on the United Kingdom market for our exports. 70% of our trade was with Britain. Our currency was tied to sterling. We had an almost completely agricultural economy dependant on the British market at low world prices. Our indus-

tries were dependent on tariff protection for survival. Economic growth was low; living standards were about 60% of the European average, which meant we were by far the poorest country which was thinking of joining the Community.

With this sort of background, it might seem that the case for joining EEC was clear cut and that there was no debate. However, there were arguments for and against. The main argument in favour of joining was the need to retain access to the British market. Additionally, we had the prospect of joining a very large European market for agricultural products with prices higher than world prices. Membership in the EEC would help inward investment. Benefits from the Regional Fund and European Social Fund were also expected. Furthermore, we believed that by sharing sovereignty to a limited extent, we would in fact gain real sovereignty, by taking part in decisions which affected our real interests. If we stayed outside, as a very small country, we would have no say in what was going to be decided. We also felt that our membership would enable us to participate fully with other democratic and like-minded countries in Europe in the movement towards European integration based on ideals and objectives which we shared.

But there were also arguments against. One of them was that we had to change the constitution. It

was argued that we would lose sovereignty, so hardly gained from Britain, and not so long before. There was an argument also that we would lose employment in our infant industries. Some believed that jobs would be transferred to the central parts of the EEC. There was a poster during the referendum campaign which said: "they want your little daughter in the Ruhr". This was an extraordinary thing to say, but a great outflow of people was expected. Another argument was that our cultural identity would be at risk. It was argued that our military neutrality, which we were closely attached to, would be endangered. Nevertheless in the referendum in 1972 a big majority was in favour of joining, 83% of the population.

When we joined, although relatively poor, we had certain advantages. We had stable democratic institutions, a functioning market economy, and the ability to take on the obligations of membership, subject to transitional arrangements. We had a well functioning public administration and technical services in fields such as customs, statistics, and animal health. There was a well functioning judicial system. We had the banks and other institutions necessary to service a market economy. We also had deficiencies: our civil service and our tiny foreign ministry had to be expanded, reorganized and trained to deal with the new

environment. The private sector had to adapt to new working conditions.

I would like to point out that the first 15 years of our membership were quite a struggle. As expected, there was a boom in agriculture because we started benefiting from unlimited access to a big market and higher prices. The rural scene was transformed with more investment in agriculture, but the economy in general remained rather stagnant. When we joined the EEC in 1973, our GDP per capita was about 60% of the European average. In the mid-80s we were still at the same level. There was a certain growth but we weren't catching up with the wealthier countries. Adaptation to free trade had been difficult. We had lost a few quite important industries. It was also a time of world recession and there was considerable domestic economic mismanagement by the Government. We had too much government spending, poor labour relations and too little investment.

In the late 1980s this changed when we introduced more market-oriented policies. A deal was done between the social partners to reduce taxes and moderate wage demands and thus achieve greater competitiveness and economic and social development. This, along with the earlier investments we had made in education, seems to have worked. Increased female





participation in the work force was also a factor. (After we joined, we had to introduce equality between men and women). Another major factor in our extraordinary development from that time was greater European integration - the Single European Act was introduced in the mid 80s and it brought about real free trade in Europe. It helped to attract businesses to invest in Ireland because once they complied with Irish regulations they were free to export into Europe. When the Single Market was introduced we gained also considerable supports as one of the poorer developing regions of the European Communities.

Increased financial aid from the European Union played a considerable part in our development. It amounted to about 3% of Irish GDP in the 1990s and it helped us greatly in developing and constructing our roads, ports and tourist facilities, in training workers and improving education. Overall, Irish economic development in the last 20 years was remarkable. By 2002 we reached 122 % of the average wealth in the European Union. Unemployment dropped from 17% to 4% in a working population which enlarged by 50%.

Since the beginning of the financial crisis, we have a big problem with the collapse of government revenues and with getting the banks lending again. In

these circumstances it is important that we are in the European Union and in the Euro zone, because we are getting a lot of vital help from the European Central Bank. There are failures but they are national failures, and not due to the European Union. There are many member states that have done quite well in these difficult times, much better than Ireland. It is important that there are good national policies even if you are a member of the EU. The economic and social balance of our membership is, however, clear. Since 1973 the standard of living has tripled, the labour force has doubled and exports have grown 50 fold in real terms, while society has been modernized.

I would also like to address our attitude towards enlargement. The formal governmental position is that we support enlargement for three main reasons. First, political necessity. Looking back at the 3rd enlargement (Spain, Portugal and Greece) we see three countries which shortly before were dictatorships, so it was a political necessity to admit them and to help them stabilize their democracies. Second, moral imperative. We joined as a poor country and have done well since then. Therefore it is our moral duty to help other countries at an earlier stage of development to join the European Union and to increase their prosper-



ity. Third, the historic opportunity to achieve stability in Europe. We have seen how relationships between neighbouring countries can improve through membership. This was also the case of our relationship with Britain. Our membership in the European Union together with Britain helped towards better understanding. That is our general attitude to enlargement. But we must insist that the European Union continues to function effectively. There is no point in enlarging Europe and finding out that it cannot work any longer. Ireland although one of the smaller EU members, has been providing training and advice to acceding and candidate countries.

To finish up, there are some lessons to be learned. It is important to stress that we were very fortunate that when we joined, and although relatively poor, we had a good civil infrastructure. Secondly, we realized the importance of an efficient internal coordination system - to know what we wanted, and go to Brussels and speak with one voice. This is essential - ensuring

effective participation in the ongoing negotiating process, which is what membership is all about. We also learned that cooperation with the institutions of the Union, in particular with the Commission, and knowing and respecting the concerns of other Member States, are very important if you want a sympathetic ear to your problems.

We learned that while membership facilitates economic and social progress it does not guarantee it. There were some occasions when we had bad internal politics. So you have to have your national policies working in the right direction. We learned to use - to the very best effect - the financial assistance available. We were able to establish good relations with those who took decisions in Brussels in terms of where the money was going.

We have also learned that it is necessary to keep citizens informed and if possible enthusiastic about EU membership, especially when, as in our case, a referendum is needed every time a Treaty needs to be ratified.

“In the EU nothing will be decided for you without you”

EMBASSY OF THE
REPUBLIC OF POLAND

H.E. Mr. Dariusz Karol Bachura,
Ambassador



Our diplomatic ties date back as far as the 10th century, when Grand Duke Samoil and his brothers met with the envoy of the first Polish ruler at the court of the German Emperor. Those were actually the first Polish-Macedonian contacts. I would also like to point out to the fact that my compatriots were present during the establishment of the Krusevo Republic and the Ilinden Uprising. Such historical background is a privilege, but it is also an obligation for both countries to nourish good relations.

From the time we have regained our independence in 1989, exactly 20 years ago, even before becoming members of NATO and the European Union, the main pillar of our foreign policy remained to keep the Euro-Atlantic doors open for any country on the continent that wishes to join. We state openly that Macedonia is a country that belongs to Europe. Macedonia is in Europe and it certainly should be in the European Union. The European Union will never be completely united without the nations of Western Balkans.

We are ready to reach out and help Macedonia on its road to the European Union not only by exchanging our positive experiences, but also by pointing out the mistakes we made, so that Macedonia does not repeat them. To quote the first Polish President after 1989 elected in free elections, Mr. Lech Walesa, when thinking about the benefits of Poland joining the EU

one can say: “There are positive pluses and negative pluses”, but certainly both are pluses. So, what exactly are those positive, and what are the negative pluses?

The negative side is that a country which now aspires to European Union has to do its homework on a very, very fast track. Bear in mind that the founding Members had decades to adjust to the European Union laws and directives. On the other hand, the countries that will become members in the near future have to do this in a very short period of time. What about the positive sides? The positives are numerous. The EU provides its Member States, especially the newcomers, with an opportunity to develop their education, modernize transport, protect the environment, develop industry, create new jobs, but also the opportunity to use financial aid in order to achieve this.

Since Poland joined the European Union 5 years ago, there has been a major shift in the mentality of my compatriots. We no longer feel like second class citizens as we did when we were behind the Iron Curtain. We are on equal footing with our friends from Western Europe. Polish students can study freely on all the prestigious universities throughout Europe, thus allowing them to have equal opportunities and same starting point for career development.

One might ask what is the interest of Poland in building this Polish-Macedonian cooperation. The sim-



plest answer is by paraphrasing the former Yugoslav song –“From Vistula to Vardar”. Skopje and Warsaw are 1,600 km away. Is it in the interest of Poland to have a strategic partnership with Macedonia and to promote Macedonia as a future member of European Union? The answer is simpler than you think. A century ago it took 2 hours to travel 20 kilometers. Now, if there would be a direct flight, it would take 2 hours to fly from Warsaw to Skopje. We have become a global village, which means that economic, social and political stability 1.600 km from Warsaw is also the stability of Central Europe. The instability of Macedonia would also have repercussions for the stability of the continent, and thus for my country as well. Therefore, it is our interest to have Macedonia in the Euro-Atlantic zone as soon as possible. This was openly said in Bucharest during the NATO summit and in Brussels when bilateral disputes started to override the questions of accession of countries to the European Union.

What can you do to become even more present in-

side the European Union? Poland and Macedonia have similar historical experiences. Both of our countries have lived in a totalitarian regime for half a century. We had to face the same obstacles at the end of the XX century - what to do to become a member of the European Union and to have a stable position inside the European Union once we become members. We, the Poles, knew that we need to cooperate both in political and in economic fields with others. It is easier to achieve something with other countries than by oneself. That is why we started searching for alliances within Europe. We soon found out that regional cooperation of countries sharing the same interests is perhaps one of the best ways to solve the problems that lie before us. Therefore we have established something that was called the Višegrad Group. Originally this group was constructed out of three Central European countries - Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland. Later, with Czechoslovakia breaking up into two countries - the Czech Republic and the Slovak Re-



public the group grew to 4 countries. This was a non-institutionalized co-operation on the political level. It pulled us as a locomotive to move forward towards our common goals, the Euro-Atlantic zone. It was a lot easier to solve the problems that stood before us by putting four heads together.

The second challenge was to establish such co-operation on the economic level, co-operation which would enable us to enter the European Union without too big of a shock. The answer to this challenge was the establishment of Central European Free Trade Agreement. CEFTA allowed us to use it as a simulation game of open and free market policy. At present, since founding fathers of CEFTA met their goal, CEFTA has enlarged and moved towards the Balkans. Macedonia is today a part of CEFTA and I am convinced that presence in this organization will help your country to get prepared for EU Membership and cope in the future with the competitive forces of the EU Market.

It has been 70 years since the outbreak of the Second World War, when the continent was completely divided. There was fighting over borders, ethnic cleansing, mass slaughter. It has been 20 years from the fall of the Berlin Wall. And it has been 5 years from the Big Bang - the biggest enlargement by 10 countries, including Poland. Time is flying fast, but it is moving in the right direction. The EU is the biggest peace project in modern history.

The President of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel, when looking at the flag of the European Union stated the following: "I perceive these 12 stars as a reminder that the world can become a better place if we sometimes have the courage to look up at the stars." Do not stop at perceiving your dreams and have the courage to fulfil all of the EU requirements and become members of the EU family. Keep in mind that by entering the European Union you will be sure that nothing will be decided for you without you.



*"We reconciled with
our neighbours without
losing our identity "*

EMBASSY OF
PORTUGAL

H.E. Mr. Luis de Almeida Sampaio,
Ambassador



The first thing I would like to say is that you belong to Europe and that you belong to the European Union. I have no doubt in my mind about that. My government has no doubt about that. The feeling, and you should take my word for it, is the consensual feeling across the European Union. Macedonia belongs to Europe. There is no doubt about that. This audience, the people I see in front of me are no different from the people I meet in similar circumstances in my own country. The same faces, the same attitude, the same way of dressing. We share a lot of common patterns, we share the same continent and we share a culture that is very close. I also feel these Southern European almost Mediterranean attitudes across the Western Balkans. Indeed, it's not a new thing to say that we have a lot of things in common. We also share lot of responsibilities. There is a lot more to be done that will lead Macedonia on its path towards the European Union. I would like to share with you the example of my country, Portugal. What we did, what happened to us, where we were a couple of years ago and where we are now. Before the democratic revolution, Portugal was a pariah country within the International Community. For the better part of the 20th century we experienced a dictatorship that really put Portugal at odds with the mainstream of the International Community. We had a regime that

care little for democracy, for the freedom of expression, freedom of media and press or for the role of civil society. We had a colonial war that devastated the finances of Portugal and forced many Portuguese to emigrate to France, Germany, and Canada and to the United States. Then, in 1974 everything changed. We had a democratic revolution followed by a political turmoil. These events put an end to colonial wars and paved the way for the independence of the Portuguese colonies. However, the Portuguese economy was in shambles. The country was utterly disorganized. In 1976 when we bid for the European Union, then the European Communities membership, the country was in a very poor shape. One can hardly imagine the economic difficulties, the unemployment and the social imbalances of the Portuguese society at that time. It took us ten long, painful, hard-working years to get into the European Communities. Very serious work awaited us. There was a lot to do in the years between 1976 and 1986 in order to get us into shape to meet the challenges of the European Union.

Once we got there, we were far from being perfect and far from being a developed country. The Portuguese economy was not in a state comparable to Germany or to France or the United Kingdom. We were still relatively poor country in comparison to the countries of the European Union. The education system,

the health system and the public administration were only some of the areas that still needed a lot of work to comply with the standards of the European Union. Therefore, the first idea I would like to underline is that you don't need to be fully prepared and highly developed to engage seriously with European integration. It is very clear to everyone that the big changes will take place only when you are inside, as a part of the family, a part of the club. The real changes will start once you are in the EU, because that's where the dynamics of the process is happening. Nevertheless, you need to be very serious in your preparation. This is true for all parties; for the Government, for the public administration for the private businesses and for the individual citizens. The role of the civil society is extremely important on the path towards the European Union.

The example of Portugal again could be of some help for a country like Macedonia. I'm only going to give you a couple of examples that could be illustrative of the use that we made of the European Union's funds in terms of development.

Back in 1986, not so long ago, when we joined the European Communities, the two main cities of Portugal, Lisbon and Porto that are some 300 km away from each other, were not entirely linked by highway. Nowadays, some 20 years after our integration we have more than 3.000 km of motorways in Portugal. It is almost impossible to drive in Portugal outside of a motorway. All these roads were built by Portuguese firms in consortium sometimes with other European companies, but basically with Portuguese expertise and with a lot of hard work. Large part of the finances was covered from funds from the European Union that are only available once you get there. The health system is just another success story. Back in 1974 the mortality rate of young babies was one of the highest in Europe.

Portugal had as much as 35 babies that would die on birth per 1.000. Now, it is less than 3 and thus one of the lowest ratios not only within the European Union but in the world as well. Our health system evolved and developed because of the integration within the European Union. Same is true for the educational system. The same year, 1974, less than 5% of the Portuguese students would get their faculty degree. Less than 5%. Now, it's more than 90%. Those huge differences can really give a perception of what was then and what changed since membership. There are also other, much more important things like the sheer social development. Now, we are members of the same family, part of a joint endeavour - the European project. We are no longer isolated and left out there. We feel that we are part of this common thing that we call Europe and the feeling of belonging is really a very big achievement; not only in political and economic terms, but also in sociological and psychological terms.

One should simply consider the relationship with the neighbours, and I know this is also a very sensitive issue in Macedonia. Take the example of the relations between two EU member states, Portugal and Spain. The history of Portugal and the history of Spain are both histories of fighting against each other. We did almost nothing else during our entire history. The history of Portugal is fighting against the Spanish for centuries. Even when we were not fighting we were dwelling back to back, but looking into different directions and they are our only neighbours; we don't have any other neighbours. They are lucky because they also have the French as neighbours. We, on the other hand, had no other neighbours except our Spanish friends to cope with. And during many centuries we were either ignorant of each other or we fought each other.





Now, I would say that there are no other countries within the European Union that enjoy better relations than Portugal and Spain. Good relations exist not only at the political or diplomatic level. There are no borders and if you go by road from Madrid to Lisbon and if you don't know the small differences between the Spanish and Portuguese language, you would never notice that you have crossed the border. The reason is that the people are the same, the mentality is the same, and the economic development is the same. The fact remains that we reconciled with our neighbours and done so without losing our identity. The European Union didn't make the Portuguese Spanish, it didn't make us French or German for that matter; we have our identity intact, our cultural heritage intact; we found our place in the family of nations, i.e., the European Union, without losing an inch of our soul. That is very important especially in a region like the Western Balkans where everyone is so sensitive about identity issues; this is almost a religious matter and again, in that respect, we didn't lose anything about our roots, our identity. As far as the past is concerned, we cherish our history, we are very proud of it as you should

be also very proud of yours, but again it is really an endeavour and adventure that is worth living through. The criteria set by the European Union to pursue the path of integration, are not invented to annoy people, they were not devised by evil bureaucrats in Brussels only to make things difficult for them. They are the necessary criteria that you need to follow in order to be prepared to join, otherwise joining would make no sense. All of these big challenges are, of course, first and foremost upon the shoulders of your Government, and let me be very clear about that, the Government is the main factor responsible for promoting the changes and adapting the public administration to those criteria. Local authorities have huge responsibility as well. There is also the individual responsibility. You need to feel that you are part of the process, that you're doing in your everyday life your bit to become citizens of Europe, which I hope you will be sooner than later. I am sure that I will get back to Veles and it will be my pleasure one day, not in a too distant future, to drink a glass of champagne with the Mayor to celebrate your integration within the European Union.

"Republic of Macedonia needs brave and responsible politicians"

MACEDONIAN CENTER FOR EUROPEAN TRAINING

Andreja Stojkovski LL.M.,
President



At its Summit held in December 2005, the European Council decided to grant the Republic of Macedonia candidate-country status for membership in the European Union. Then, the Council believed that Macedonia is stable and functional democracy and that in the course of the accession negotiations, once they are opened, the state will fully prepare for EU membership. This decision was the crowning event of the successful mobilization of all state capacities to answer the European Commission's Questionnaire, which the then High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, referred to as "the longest love letter that the European Union ever received".

Macedonia lost many opportunities, while certain steps taken by the Government instead of bringing us closer, only distanced us more from the EU. Moreover, the Republic of Macedonia took several steps which the Republic of Greece perceived as provocation, and resulted not only in our loss of sympathy from the latter, but also in the loss of other Member-States' sympathy and understanding, Republic of Macedonia did not need an Airport named "Alexander the Great", when it provides for only one gate per departure/arrival, nor did it need a Football Stadium named "National Arena - Philip II" where third-league football and sport games would be organized, that anyhow are not invested in properly. What Macedonia needed the least was to rename the Trans-European Corridor X into highway "Alexander the

Macedonian". To make things even worse, Macedonia lost 50 million EUR non-refundable assistance from the Republic of Greece, while the resolution of the bilateral name dispute with the Republic of Greece became the main pre-condition for Macedonia's future progress in its EU accession process.

The abovementioned somehow resembles a Macedonian folk tale, where the Republic of Macedonia is the bride who found her boyfriend (EU) and in 2005 they got engaged (the year when the Republic of Macedonia was granted the candidate-country status). After four years of engagement, it is only natural for the bride to enter the wedlock and start a family. As destiny would have it, just when the wedding preparations start the mother-in-law (Greece) appears and tells the bride what she is to do in order to get married: prepare dowries for the entire family (27 Member-States), buy an apartment, equip it with furniture, buy a car, bring three fields and two vineyards in the marriage. Requirements indicated by the mother-in-law are not ill-intentioned, as - from her point of view, a marriage is more successful when built on sound foundations. However, such requirements dramatically complicate the bride's position. Thus, she is now faced with two options: 1) as she cannot render what she was required by the mother-in-law, the bride can break off the engagement with the love of her life and get back together with her ex-boyfriend (the Non-Aligned Countries) so as finally settle, or 2) she can de-



cide to apply for a bank loan and deliver all requirements imposed by the mother-in-law, in the hope that one day both, the mother-in-law and the in-laws, would realize their requirements were an unrealistic and unfair burden for her.

The tale of Macedonia qualifies for this categorization simply due to the fact that the name dispute lasts for 20 years now. In real life, people solve their problems, and the bride (Macedonia) cannot be engaged for 20 years, while in politics matters remain unsolved. We can only hope that the bride will find a solution, gather her courage, stop holding the grudge for her mischief destiny and one day - when she becomes the mother-in-law - would know to behave in a more righteous manner.

Certainly, the name dispute is a bilateral issue and what is important is to fulfill the benchmarks and obtain the European Commission's recommendation for opening the accession negotiations, but it is the Council of Ministers that takes a unanimous decision on setting the date thereof, where the Republic of Greece has its permanent representative. It is more than clear that the European Union has committed and assumed responsibilities as regards the region, including the Republic of Macedonia, but it is also clear that the principle of solidarity and the decision-making rules are what they are, and the Republic of Macedonia cannot achieve much if

it remains outside the European Union. Things can be changed more easily from within.

According to the Interim Accord, the Republic of Macedonia has committed to negotiate under UN auspices and as part of the mediation efforts of Mr. Matthew Nimetz related to the state's international name, i.e., finding a solution that would replace the reference "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". What makes the European Union different from the United States of America is its belief that different cultures, languages, nations, ethnic groups and like are Europe's comparative advantage. The European Union revives extinguished languages, cherishes the culture of its Member States, their history and identity. The Republic of Macedonia, the Macedonian language and the Macedonian nation and identity would be protected the moment we join the Union. The sooner we do this, the better.

At this moment, the Republic of Macedonia needs brave and responsible politicians, leaders who would act for the benefit of their citizens, leaders who would take initiative and look to the future, rather than the past.

The problem is not a simple one, but if we approach it in this manner, it would be much easier for us to reach a solution thereof, and the solution will include securing the future of the Republic of Macedonia and its citizens.

“If Macedonia is the problem, Europe is the solution”¹

ROYAL INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES ELCANO

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“If Spain is the problem, Europe is the solution”. This statement of the famous Spanish philosopher in the 1920s, José Ortega y Gasset, very much summarizes the relationship of Spain with Europe. In those years Ortega y Gasset’s statement implied that Spain had so many political and economic troubles that the only way out seemed to be Europe. It is interesting that this quote has been a reality for Spain for the whole of the 20th century. Furthermore, the quote can also be applied to any or almost all European countries that have experienced very complex internal situations and have believed in European solutions to solve them. Spain together with Portugal has also been a victim of another very cruel division of Europe in the 20th century. We all know about the division of Europe into two blocks - the Eastern and the Western block. However, there was another division and a third block after the Second World War in Western Europe between democracies and dictatorships, and unfortunately the Iberian Peninsula was left under the control of authoritarian dictatorships which prevented countries and old nations like Spain to be part of mainstream Western Europe.

This is why joining the European Union or what was then the European Community became so important for Spain. I’m going to tell you a bit about the process by which Spain managed to become a member of

the European Union because it just gives you an idea of how frustrating negotiations usually are, and how difficult the entrance process can be. Spain applied to the European Community as early as 1962, five years after the European Community was created. And the first application was turned down for political reasons - Spain was not a democracy and this provoked a rejection, although the European Community initiated economic relations with Spain which played a very important role in the economic transformation that Spain experienced in the 1960s. After the re-establishment of democracy in 1977, Spain was so eager to join the European Community that only a month after the first general elections, the new government submitted the first application for membership. However, Spain was still to wait for another 9 years to become a member, due to the very long process of negotiations. Negotiations officially began in 1979 but there were going to be a series of obstacles that would prevent Spanish entry. The most serious obstacle was the French veto in 1980. Shortly after the negotiations began, France vetoed Spain’s entry. This of course leads us to a very important conclusion about negotiations which Macedonia knows very well. The European Union is like a rich men’s club which in order to join you need to get along with each member, who is going to have a vote.

¹ Paraphrased statement of José Ortega y Gasset in the 1920s.



And this can at times be very a complex and difficult matter. It was complex in the case of Spain when there were 10 members in the European Community and it is even much more complex today when there are 27 members of the Union. The case of Spain's entry being vetoed by France was very frustrating. One might ask himself why the French blocked the Spaniards, since Portugal was also involved in negotiations and affected by it. Well, there were many reasons. First of all, there were some agricultural problems which challenged French's agriculture. Secondly, 1980 was electoral year and of course, the French president of that time, Giscard d'Estaing, decided that the veto was a good option.

What did Spain do in relation to this veto? Two years later the political situation changed, the Socialist Party won the elections in Spain and this coincided with the fact that the socialists were also governing France (Francois Mitterrand had won the elections a year before). It was then assumed that since the two social-

ist governments were in power, the French veto would clearly be overcome, but this was not so easy because as Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez stated at that time: "the French are more French than socialist".

However, the veto was eventually overcome, but this was not the only problem, of course. Spain was still to negotiate very difficult issues with other member-states from 1982 to 1985 when Spain finally became a member. There were problems, for example, with Britain, the conflict over Gibraltar, which had kept the two countries confronted diplomatically over sovereignty of this very small British enclave in Spanish soil. During the negotiations Britain offered Spain its support on the condition that the Spanish government would lift the blockade on Gibraltar, and Spain accepted. There were other conditions from other countries, for example, from the Benelux countries - Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg had very bitter memories of Spain's religious bigotry in other centuries. They demanded that Spain should establish relations with



Israel, since the state of Israel still had not been officially recognized. Again Spain complied with this requirement and accepted it. Others did not impose conditions, strictly speaking, but made suggestions like Germany's Chancellor Kohl advising Prime Minister Gonzalez to keep the country in NATO because NATO was very divided issue in Spain; Spain had joined NATO in 1981, but the Socialist Party initially promised to withdraw Spain from this organization. But Felipe Gonzalez changed his view in relation to NATO and decided that the country should stay in the Atlantic Alliance. Obviously, Helmut Kohl's advice had a lot of influence on this matter. So, it was a difficult process, it was very difficult to get every single EC member in favour of Spain's entrance, and for this reason this was not achieved until 1985.

There were important internal factors which helped Spain in this long process of negotiations. When the negotiations are not going well, it is very easy for the population to get annoyed, disappointed with the Eu-

ropean Union and to start believing that the European Union is just not interested at all. Spain, just as Portugal, had to do a lot of efforts, to get the country in shape for joining the European Community. And let us not forget that the 1970s when these negotiations started were very bad times. Those were years of one of the most serious economic crises that we've ever had in Europe. And this was when Spain and Portugal started doing their homework required for joining the European Community.

Spain was helped by internal consensus in relation to the European Community, in the sense that all were in favour of joining. The so-called euro-scepticism, which was starting to be such a big problem in many European countries, did not exist in Spain. When the issue of the European Community was voted in the Spanish parliament all parties from the right to the left were in favour of joining the European Community. The same applied to the civil society. There was great enthusiasm for membership. There was a strong belief that Eu-

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rope was the solution, despite the fact that this Europe seemed to making things very difficult for Spain.

I would like to say a few words about the Spanish membership. What was Spain's experience as a member? Spain, we can say, has had a privileged experience as a member of what was then the European Community and is the European Union now. From 1985 to the present, the transformation of Spain is extraordinary. Spain is the 8th economy in the world at present and that would have not been possible without the help of the European Union. The way Spain has benefited using structural and cohesion funds has been extraordinary; the country has been radically transformed: the road infrastructure has been built and the cities modernised. As a result, Spain now has one of the best transport systems in Western Europe, just like Portugal. It is also amazing how Spanish and Portuguese cities were transformed. Anyone travelling to Spain and Portugal in 1970s would not recognize the two countries in the 1980s or in the 1990s - it's an amazing change that has very much contributed to the economy and its industrial development. Another important issue is the welfare state. Spain consolidated modern welfare state with a universal health system in the late 1980s thanks to the European Union. Therefore it is no surprise that Prime Minister Gonzalez in those days and all governments since then have been very much advocates of the principle of solidarity, the idea that the less well-off must be beneficiaries of these very important funds for developing their countries. As a result of this, Spain has made a very important progress not only as a member, but also within the European Union. Spain moved from being a relatively marginalized country in Western Europe to being in mainstream Europe and being very much an influential voice whenever there where decisions to be taken.

Very important, of course, was the entrance into the Euro zone and the introduction of the single currency. This by the way also required a tremendous effort, because when the debate on the single currency started in 1992, Spain did not fulfil a single of the economic criteria required for joining. It was only thanks to a very strict program of economic progress and austerity imposed by the new Popular Party government in 1996 that Spain eventually managed to fulfil the criteria of the European Union a few years later. So, this just gives you an idea of how privileged the relationship between Spain and the European Union has been. It was a privileged relationship which required a lot of effort from both sides. I think it is very important to take into consideration the fact that nowadays we tend to forget the efforts that some countries have made in order to transform their societies. And this is surely something that a country like yours must remember. Even though Europe is the solution for a country's internal problems, a country must never lose its own internal development plan in order to project its strength to the rest of Europe.

This is how I would like to conclude, saying that the privileged relationship that Spain established and enjoyed within the European Union can certainly be reproduced in other areas and in other times. It is true that Spain, as well as Portugal, have had the privilege of a smaller European Union. This was the case of the enlargement of 1980s and also a better context of Europe in an era of economic growth - the 1980s and early 1990s, which were very good years. Now the circumstances are very different. But let us not forget that when all of this started, when Spain and Portugal started their march towards the European Community, the economic circumstances were even worse than the present ones in Europe.

“It is time to think about the future”

EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

H.E. Mr. Alan Bryan Bergant,
Ambassador



In March 2004, Slovenia became a member of NATO and two months later, together with other nine countries, member of the European Union. This was followed with the introduction of the Euro as the national currency and joining the Schengen Area. These are the major challenges Macedonia faces now. On the 15th September, the European Commission will close the Progress Report for Macedonia, which will be officially presented on the 14th October. According to information from Ljubljana and Brussels I dispose with, this Report will be positive because Macedonia has achieved a lot in the last weeks.

Last March, Macedonia was presented with the famous 8 Benchmarks, but due to the Early Elections it developed the additional ninth benchmark. According to the OSCE and ODIHR monitoring report, on the March 2009 Elections Macedonia fulfilled this benchmark on free and fair elections. The recent adoption of the Law on Civil Servants completed the sixth benchmark. This means there is serious progress made in the fulfillment of the criteria set forth by the Commission. Nevertheless, current progress does not mean that everything ends on the 14th October. Good implementation is also expected. In Macedonia, laws are passed in accelerated procedures by the Parliament, but the country stumbles over in regard to their implementation.

Another very important thing for the common citizen is the visa liberalization. Slovenia understands quite well the impediments imposed by the visa barrier, as in the times of the former Yugoslavia, Slovenians and Macedonians, as well as others, did not have problems traveling. But Macedonia was left behind the visa curtain and Macedonians are not able to travel freely. Everyday we see hundreds of people waiting in lines in front of Embassies. During the Slovenian Presidency over the European Union, the so-called Visa Liberalization Agreement entered into effect on 1st January 2008 and targeted certain categories of citizens, such as teachers, journalists, truck drivers, businessmen, etc. In this period, almost 45% of the visas issued by our Embassy were free of charge.

The visa liberalization process was launched under the chairmanship of Dragutin Mate over the EU Council, as the Slovenian Minister of Foreign Affairs, when Franco Frattini was the EU Commissioner on Freedom and Justice, whereas a major role was played by our former Ambassador to Macedonia, Marjan Siftar. Thus, countries from the region were presented with certain conditions which Macedonia fulfilled and obtained the best assessment thereof. The conditions included introduction of integrated border management, biometric passports, establishing the Visa Center at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc. Slovenia provided additional

assistance in connecting Macedonian Embassies with the Visa Center at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Slovenia supported the proposal of the European Commission for the three countries - Montenegro, Serbia and Macedonia - to be granted visa liberalization from the 1st January 2010. For Slovenia, this is an already done deal. Now, it is time to think about the future.

Accession to the EU must be an open process and citizens must be informed continuously on what the Union stands for. Slovenia paid a special attention to the communication with the public. The Government adopted strategies, communication program on public information on the EU accession's importance. As a result, according to all Euro-barometer polls, Slovenia was one of the states whose citizens were the best informed on EU.

One of the public communication programs was the "Euro-Phone", a specially designated telephone line, 080-2000. Our goal was accession in 2000, but Slovenia closed the negotiations in 2002, which was followed with the membership in 2004. On this telephone line, as well as via specially designated e-mail addresses, citizens were able to ask questions and get information. We distributed "Euro-Postcards" on which citizens could write various questions on the European Union and the Slovenian membership. As part of the "Euro-Bus" program trained people traveled throughout Slovenia, both towns and smaller settlements. Special target groups were also informed on the EU: journalists, businessman, students, farmers, etc. The Government's motto for the campaign was "Slovenia At Home in Europe".

The importance of precise and timely information for citizens is demonstrated with the visa liberalization example. Hence, lately it can be heard that as of 1st January Macedonians can travel, work and study in

EU member-states. Unfortunately, that is not true. As of 1st January there will be no waiting in lines in front of Embassies, but the other requirements remain. One will still need travel insurance, as well as proof of sufficient funds for the trip and the accommodation. That is why citizens need to be informed. The Embassy will support the Ministry of Interior, the Secretariat on European Affairs and one non-governmental organization in the implementation of the campaign on promoting visa liberalization and the consequences thereof.

Slovenia is an EU member for 5 years now. Benefits from EU membership are already visible. Probably the biggest benefit was joining the Schengen Area. Previously, we were traveling from Ljubljana to Trieste for 2 hours, whereas now it takes us only 45 minutes, as there are no borders in the Schengen Area all the way to Portugal, i.e., Sweden and Finland on the north - one can travel freely. Young people from Slovenia have forgotten what border crossing points mean. When my friends travel from Ljubljana to Skopje by car, they say they need to show their passports at least three times. Even with the visa liberalization initiation, all EU airports have separate entrance booths for „EU citizens“ and „others“. This rule concerned Slovenia until it joined the Schengen Area. I am an example thereof. When I worked in Finland and traveled with my Finnish friends to Estonia, they passed the border in one minute, whereas I was waiting in the „others“ line. We expressed our dissatisfaction with this treatment in a symbolic way by means of a campaign. In the center of Ljubljana we have the Trimostie, a bridge with three strands - one for cars and two for pedestrians. On one side of the bridge we wrote down „EU citizens“ and on the other „others“. Macedonia will overcome this by becoming member of the EU and joining the Schengen Area.



One of the benefits for Slovenia, and especially nowadays in the times of the financial crisis, was the introduction of the Euro as the payment currency. Common market benefits are of particular importance for the ordinary citizens: the so called euro tariffs for roaming. The highest price calculated by the operators for calls abroad is 42 euro cents, while pricing is done per second. Then we have the 112 free-toll for emergencies and the European Health Insurance Card.

EU citizens have the right to work in other member-states. Although Slovenia is a member from 2004, Slovenians are still not allowed to work freely in certain countries, such as Germany or Austria, because

of the so-called transitional periods in effect. In 2011, Slovenians will be able to work freely in all EU member-states. Also, EU citizens can retire and move to another member-state with the sole obligation of registering themselves at the nearest police station.

Special benefit is the mobility of knowledge. EU citizens can benefit from education programs such as Erasmus, Comenius, Grundtvig, Leonardo Da Vinci, etc. At the times when I was a student, there were no possibilities for tuition-free studies or scholarships for studying abroad. During my stay in Helsinki, Finland, I met many Slovenian students who - by benefiting from the education programs - were there as exchange students.



Finally, Slovenians have the right to vote and be elected as Members of the European Parliament. This year on the 7th June, Slovenia for the second time elected its Members to the European Parliament. This is a major benefit. Slovenians are represented by 7 Members of EP. You all know Jelko Kacin and Aloyz Peterle, who have always supported Macedonia. Janez Potocnik is our EU Commissioner and there are around 350 Slovenians who work at EU institutions. What helped Slovenia the most in promoting itself within the European Union was the Slovenian Presidency of the EU.



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