

OPENING STATEMENT of Mr Jasmin Kjahil,
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Embassy of the Republic of North Macedonia – London
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At the Irish Parliament - Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

Thank you for the opportunity to deliver my address at this important Committee in the Irish Parliament. We have a special relationship with Ireland on the subject of today. Namely, in 2004, my country submitted its Application for membership of the European Union, just when Ireland was chairing the European Council. The support from your country is always important to us on our European path.

In the recent period, the Republic of North Macedonia has completed thorough systemic domestic reforms and has solved longstanding and particularly difficult and sensitive open issues with its neighbors Bulgaria (Agreement on Friendship, Good-neighborliness, and Cooperation, 2017) and Greece (Prespa Agreement - 2018). We have shown the maturity to pay a high political price, but we think that it is only an appropriate path – the path that secures the prosperity of the country. The European perspective and especially the promise of opening of the accession negotiations was the key motivation for us to deliver on all fields.

That is why there is a great feeling of disappointment and bitterness among the citizens of North Macedonia, regardless of their ethnicity. European Union did not deliver a long time promised start of the accession negotiations, although we have delivered by doing reforms and changing such a sacred thing as the name of the country, which is a still highly polarizing issue among our citizens.

North Macedonia is an EU-candidate country since December 2005. Regarding NATO, following the signature by the Allies of the Accession Protocol, the country can now take part in NATO activities as an invitee. Once the Protocol has been ratified in the capitals of each of the 29 Allies, according to national procedures, North Macedonia will become a 30th member of NATO. We are assuming that it will happen up to April 2020.

There are already some consequences from the last month’s EU-Council decision: the Prime Minister, Mr. Zoran Zaev requested early Parliamentary elections that will enable the citizens to decide on how to further continue the European integration of North Macedonia. The elections will be held on 12th April 2020, 7 months before the regular date.

North Macedonia, as well as the other countries from Western Balkans, has NO OTHER CHOICE than to continue on its way to full membership in the European Union. We know that we have to implement the necessary reforms to fully comply with the European values and to reach European standards. But, for us, the membership in the European Union is not an objective in itself, rather it means improving the society based on European merits.

The latest conclusions of the European Council leave North Macedonia in great uncertainty: whether this represents a withdrawal of the European perspective for EU membership for the countries of our region? This would not only be a historical mistake but a strategic failure of the European Union.

We are aware that today the EU enlargement does not resonate well within some EU member states’ public. We should work very hard on changing the perception of our region in the EU. If this can be achieved through reforming the methodology of the current accession process and merit-based evaluation for every candidate separately, then, North Macedonia fully supports such an approach. The full membership in the European Union is the goal of my country that cannot be replaced by just “special” relations with the EU, or any other country outside the EU.

Now, we are very close to reaching the other pillar of our long term Foreign Affairs Strategy since our independence in 1991 - the membership in NATO. The EU membership now seems very distant, but we are certain that we’ll reach this goal-as a European country, there is no alternative. The results of the Irish membership in the EU are the best recommendation for us never to give up efforts for reaching this goal, no matter how long and difficult this process will be. But, at first, the process of accession negotiation has to start. Better sooner than later.