

Joint Committee on EU Affairs of the Irish Parliament
Opening Address by Mrs Eli Bojadjieska Ristovski,
Chargé d’Affaires, Embassy of the Republic of North Macedonia
21.09.2022

Thank you Mr Chair,

Good morning to you all and thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to address you today.

I am very honoured to stand in front of you and provide an update on the status of North Macedonia’s European integration and to have the opportunity to brief each other and contribute to your wider strategic discussion on EU enlargement.

Let me first express my gratitude for the continuous interest and strong support of the Irish Parliament for the EU enlargement. Ireland has always been a firm supporter of the enlargement, not only in words, but in deeds too.

This meeting comes at the start of a new chapter for my country. Two months ago, on 19th July the first Intergovernmental Conference took place with North Macedonia. This was the opening phase of the accession negotiations with the EU and it provided the long-sought recognition for the reform efforts of the country.

Last Friday, on 15th September, we saw the actual start of the screening process, whereby EU experts have begun examining EU laws and policies under Cluster 1 on Fundamentals. This will not be just a technical exercise, but one with concrete impact on improving the quality of life of citizens on a long term.

Honourable members of the Joint Committee,

I would like to underline that my country has transformed many years of disappointments, obstacles and blockades into yet another challenge that enabled us to offer arguments, show persistence and trust in good-neighbourly relations, coming thus to a solution facilitating the start of EU accession negotiations.

The long awaited new chapter in the European integration process after 17 long years of being a candidate country and facing many challenges on our path to the EU is an achievement that citizens have long been deserving of.

We have proven to be a European country that knows how to build compromise and doesn’t play the zero sum game. We are a multi-ethnic state with unique model of consensual democracy and have a lot to share and contribute to the EU’s accommodating diversity. Some have questioned our reliability to respect pledges we make – Ohrid Framework Agreement, Friendship Agreement with Bulgaria and the process that followed and Prespa Agreement are all examples to the contrary.

We strongly believe that the EU integration process will be an additional drive which will mobilize all stakeholders in the country, to work together committed to our reform dossier, as the European integration has always been a substantive cohesive element of our society.

Our place is in the European Union. We have said many times so far that we are a reliable partner to the EU and its member states and we will continue to work and function in this way. Our aim is to be a positive example of the fastest integration to the EU, just as we had the fastest integration of a member state into NATO.

In this respect, the government made a commitment to advance on EU related reforms, especially in the areas of the judiciary, fight against corruption, organized crime etc. On this road, we know that we can count on our Irish friends.

May I add two more elements that speak of our determination and commitment to the EU agenda:

The first one - the alignment with EU's Common Foreign Security Policy – North Macedonia has 100% Common Foreign Security Policy compliance and is a reliable partner in the current very troubled geopolitical context.

It also has 100% alliance with restrictive measures. This however also has a socio-economic impact, notably on energy, and it is important that the EU shows how it involves WB partners when taking actions to mitigate the consequences of the war in Ukraine.

The second one - the country's growing regional cooperation (i.e. Open Balkans). With its conciliatory approach to solving bilateral issues, we are slowly taking up leading position in the context of growing regional cooperation and might serve as a role model and contribute to strengthening regional stability. We are participant in the Open Balkan initiative but also supporting the Berlin process and actively contributing to its deliverables within the Common regional Market (scheduled summit for 3 November in Berlin is welcomed). Our strong position is that all regional initiative should be inclusive and not interfere with future EU negotiation processes (EU acquis alignment should be respected).

Let me conclude by expressing our hopes that Ireland will be by our side along the way, just as it has been so far. On his last visit to Skopje on 4 July this year, Minister Thomas Byrne voiced Ireland's strong support and, most importantly, deep understanding of the importance of preserving our own language and national identity while integrating in the EU.

I believe that Ireland is best placed to understand and advocate the opportunities that EU membership bring to a country, may that be in economic, political or other areas. We intend to follow your example and to prove the premise true.

Thank you.