



Bulgaria and North Macedonia: Political leadership and constructive dialogue should prevail

PES Presidency statement on the state of play of the accession negotiations process

The Party of the European Socialists is disappointed that EU accession negotiations for the Republic of North Macedonia face an early setback, after the Bulgarian government announced it is blocking the process for the time being. The political wisdom of both countries is being put to the test - only the language of cooperation and a full appreciation of the long-term perspectives in the region can successfully overcome this obstacle.

European socialists and democrats have always been supportive of the enlargement process for the Western Balkans. The PES welcomed the European Council's endorsement of the opening of accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania in March this year and the draft negotiating framework presented to Member States in July.

Today, the PES would like to express its hope that an equitable and in-depth dialogue between Bulgaria - which has been an EU Member State for 13 years - and North Macedonia - which has strongly expressed its desire to join the Union – will find a solution to the benefit of both countries. Prime Minister of North Macedonia Zoran Zeav continues to demonstrate courage and leadership as he looks for a way through the deadlock, giving the first signal that such an in-depth dialogue is possible. The swift start of accession negotiations will positively impact the long-term relationship between Bulgaria and North Macedonia, as well as the whole Western Balkans region. It is time for all to act responsibly and with wisdom, led by the vision of a common European future.

The PES is worried by the rising wave of nationalism and right-wing rhetoric in both Bulgaria and North Macedonia which surrounds the setback of the accession negotiations. People in both countries will remember the hate speech in the region during the previous conservative government of the then Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In Skopje, VMRO-DPMNE disrupted the dialogue with Bulgaria, Greece and the whole region, making EU accession an impossible dream. Under their tenure, North Macedonia experienced a decade of frozen integration and troubled relations with neighbouring countries. Today, VMRO-DPMNE continue to play dangerous political games with hate speech, igniting confrontation. This is not the future the people of North Macedonia want.

It is the Socialdemocratic government of Zoran Zaev which led North Macedonia to the starting point of EU negotiations, and he remains the best person to continue that process, if the country is given the chance.

