



Donald TUSK
President
European Council

Brussels, 16 October 2019

Dear President,

The deliberations of the General Affairs Council on 15 October 2019 on Enlargement concluded with a regrettable failure to reach a unanimous accord of Ministers on the opening of EU accession negotiations with the Republic of North Macedonia and Albania.

While it is your prerogative as President of the European Council to set up the agenda of these Summits, on behalf of the European progressive family, please allow me to strongly encourage you to place the topic of Enlargement on the agenda of the upcoming European Council meeting.

I believe it is neither necessary to restate the magnitude and the strategic importance of the matter to the EU, nor to mention the numerous arguments already made in the run-up to this crucial Council meeting. I do appreciate your personal efforts and commitment to this issue so far.

However, please allow me to insist on the need for a final effort – a last chance to find agreement between all European leaders on this issue. Given its importance for the strategic, economic and security interests of the EU, we believe that our Heads of State or Government should be presented with the opportunity to further deliberate the matter in person.

The PES, including Heads of State or Government from our political family, has always supported the European integration process of these Western Balkans countries. We have never ceased to positively engage in driving the necessary reforms forward, in close cooperation with parties, leaders, institutions and civil society in the region, even at times when the Enlargement policy was not exactly on top of the EU agenda. We do this with the conviction that these countries belong to our Community of peoples, to our Union of shared values, peace, security and prosperity, and we should spare no effort in helping them achieve the same level of development that we in the EU enjoy today. We believe that these countries are not only part of Europe's past, but should also be an integral part of the future of the EU. We need to go in the same direction, albeit at a different pace, instead of sidelining the countries until an ephemeral 'right time', which seems to never come or never be convenient enough for everybody.

The Republic of North Macedonia and Albania in particular have walked a long and difficult way in order to find themselves today at the eve of the opening of pre-accession negotiations. On the basis of the set criteria and a rigorous process, the European Commission, tasked with managing this process, has recognised that they have done the necessary in order to pass to the next stage. As a leader of our political family, please allow me to say that in political terms they have done much more than covering the benchmarks.



Leading their nations, progressive Prime Ministers Zoran Zaev and Edi Rama have invested significant political capital, undertaking painful reforms and taking difficult decisions in order to advance on their European path. The Prespa Agreement between the Republic of North Macedonia and Greece, for example, which settled the long-lasting name dispute between the two countries, was no less than historic. It was a vivid demonstration of the determination of the political leadership of these countries to turn the page of confrontation in the region and take the countries into a new era of European cooperation, solidarity and sincere friendship.

The pre-accession negotiations should not be seen as a mere reward, but rather as a process which has real added value and provides the countries and the EU with the necessary leverage to enhance the previous achievements, build on the progress made and further align the accession countries with EU policies and standards. Without our support, it would be much more difficult for them to catch up on their own. This is the very reason the Enlargement policy exists, and it is widely recognised as one of the most successful EU policies.

To disregard the achievements of the two countries, together with our own Enlargement policy and commitments now would be a grave strategic mistake. As Prime Minister of Bulgaria at the time of our EU accession, I personally know too well the hard work needed in the negotiations process and in the run-up to the final stage. I also know how the fear of further postponement resonates in the public opinion. The mere prospect of the achievement of the great national goal slipping through the fingers and fading away, despite the best efforts of an entire nation, not just the public administration, nurtures disappointment and frustration in society.

If the EU does not honour its commitments now, this frustration in societies would only break the trust they now have in the EU and fuel destructive anti-EU populism and nationalism. We cannot possibly allow the resurgence of nationalism to undermine the efforts towards peace and reconciliation in this still fragile region of young democracies, where wounds of the past have not yet fully healed. This is not in the best interests of the EU, and will certainly play in the hands of other players, who would be eager to fill in the void we leave behind.

Therefore, I fear that failing to deliver now would not only undermine the EU's credibility, but also jeopardise the Enlargement policy and derail the European integration process of the Western Balkan countries for the time to come. We must not fail.

We owe this not only to the peoples of the Western Balkans countries, but also to all EU citizens, who expect decisive action and responsible leadership, and not just 'signals'.

Kind regards,



Sergei STANISHEV
President
Party of European Socialists