When Talking About Macedonia, We Must Focuse on the Future, not on the Past. It Would Be Beneficial for All.

Prof. Georgi Dimitrov

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On the one hand, it is a positive sign that, at least from time to time, here we talk about our Western neighbor and sibling. On the other hand, it is quite negative that we continue to treat this issue like Macedonia-obsessed historians.

When speaking of Gotse Delchev[1], for example, our first concern should be to keep in mind that we are not talking about on organism, but about a political figure – his blood type or DNA don't matter at all because what matters is his cause. And it can hardly be disputed, at least by competent and responsible people, that his cause is dedicated not to digging into the ethnical composition of the people there, but rather to the selfless fight for the future of the country. This is exactly why I have a question to those who in words swear in his memory – what exactly are you sacrificing today so that you can be faithful to the ideals and cause he gave his life for?

If we want to be his true followers, not in words but in action, it is precisely now that we need to embrace the Macedonian cause as ours, because it is - in essence - ours, as long as we are convinced that the prospective future of us, the Bulgarians, depends on the success of the European integration. This is crucially a matter of comprehanded and consistently followed long lasting policy - based on wide public trust and support.

Because there is no chance for it to be easy. But had it been easier for the Germans and the French to decisively abandon their past for the sake of their successful future? Would it have been better to remember that in 1871 and 1940 the Germans marched victoriously in Paris? Or the number of those killed in the two battles of the Marne? Or the victims of the iprit attacks? Why the oblivion of that history is easier than the one, which our alleged patriots wave as a banner here in Bulgaria.

The country of North Macedonia has made a serious historical transition towards its European future. Not only by finding a way to overcome the ridiculous dispute over its name by the local and Greek nationalists. What is even more important is that **as of today, a) the progress of the country in the sectoral policies monitored, b) according to the degree of compliance with the recommendations of the European Commission and, above all, c)**

[1] A prominent revolutionary of Bulgarian origin who fought and died in battle for the freedom of Macedonia.

the seven priority issues determining the quality of the political life in the country, it definitely overtakes Serbia and Montenegro, which are already negotiating for EU membership. [2] Now it is time for them to get the needed political support.

The least we ought do for our friends and neighbours is help them get rid of the widely spread delusions. And the most widely spread one is that the European Union must take the countries from the Western Balkans, no matter what they are at the moment, just to ensure that they do not fall under the political influence of alternative geopolitical players such as Russia, China, Turkey or any other Arab country. "We are getting tired of waiting" is not and cannot be an argument leading to the resolution of this issue.

But this is not being understood. At a recent conference in Bulgaria a former Macedonian politician, a current local professor, reminded with a disappointment in his voice that this year the European Commission provided assessment on the readiness of Albania and North Macedonia to begin negotiations for membership. "And this has been the case for 10 years now…" he reminded ruefully.

This prompted me to remind the audience that Matteo Bonomi, an international expert on the EU enlargement to the Western Balkans, used a telling metaphor of "soft belly". [3] It is not something one can die from, however, it is terribly unprestigious and obviously something needs to be done if we want to get in good shape. Yet, this metaphor is extremely misleading, because the belly is a matter of personal concern - it cannot be expected to take things under control and fix itself. But this is exactly what the countries from the region need to do – take ownership – because noone else will come from outsides and fix them. And to the question I posed to my colleague, the professor – "Which are, at least, the three strategic national policies through which your governments pursue persistently the successful Europeanisation of your society?", I did not get an answer at all. An answer, however, is due, and the full participation in the Berlin process cannot be a substitute for it.

But our partners do deserve to receive an invitation to begin the negotiation process as a definitive proof that their practical advancement has been noticed and appreciated. The negotiations bring hope and political opportunity but not a guarantee that they will end successfully. It is necessary, however, to maintain an EU enlargement policy, which is even more successful in resolving the contradiction, namely – as they are now (definitely lagging more behind than Bulgaria and Romania at the starting point of their negotiations) the countries from the region are not ready to access the Union. At the same time, notwithstanding this fact, the EU itself must encourage exactly a course of European integration with an even higher degree of robust engagement there. And Bulgaria – its politicians and society – are a key element of this shared European responsibility.

[2] More details about these developments see in G. Vurmo "The Uncertainty of EU Enlargement" (http://idmalbania.org/analysis-the-uncertainty-of-eu-enlargement-june-2019/).

[3] Matteo Bonomi - Off Track. The EU's Re-engagement with the Western Balkans, IAI Papers, April 2019 (https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/track-eus-re-engagement-western-balkans.).