



**Mr Boyko Borissov**  
Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria  
1 Dondukov Blvd  
1594 Sofia, Bulgaria

**Ms Ekaterina Zaharieva**  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria  
2 Aleksandar Zhendov Str.  
1113 Sofia, Bulgaria

*Brussels, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2020*

## Open letter in response to Bulgaria's veto to the EU talks with North Macedonia

Dear Prime Minister Borissov,  
Dear Minister Zaharieva,

As representatives of non-governmental organisations gathering over 10,000 young activists advocating for a united and democratic Europe, we are worried about the Bulgarian government's decision to veto the EU accession talks with North Macedonia by refusing to approve the membership negotiation framework on 17th November 2020.

The European Commission recommended starting accession negotiations with the country every year since 2009. After the 2018 Prespa agreement and the name change to North Macedonia, the Greek veto was lifted and the country has made steady progress towards starting official talks. Notably, Bulgaria supported these efforts, making the integration of the Western Balkans a priority of its EU Council Presidency in 2018. France's insistence on revising the accession criteria further delayed the start and in March 2020, the Council once again agreed to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia, while the decision on the negotiation framework was expected to be a logical next step.

Your refusal to approve the framework calls into question the credibility of the EU to all countries interested in European integration. A set of transparent criteria was set for North Macedonia to join the Union and it has made a great effort to meet them with good results, as assessed by the European Commission. Expanding the list with additional requirements compromises the promise of European integration which so far has served to promote democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights. In a world where democracy is challenged and authoritarian regimes seem to be gaining strength, an impasse in negotiations risks playing into the hands of those who would see Europe weakened and divided.

Although we understand the importance of clarifying misunderstandings between Bulgaria and North Macedonia over history and language, we believe that solutions will never come from ultimatums but only through dialogue and goodwill on both sides. By blocking North Macedonia's European integration, you deny 2 million Europeans the possibility to enjoy the freedoms and opportunities from which you have benefited for the last 13 years, after overcoming numerous obstacles to your own membership.

Rather than using Bulgaria's position as an EU Member to entirely block your neighbour's European aspirations, we invite you to create new opportunities for North Macedonia to engage with your shared past in order to build a better future through a joint effort, building on the 2017 Treaty of Friendship. Failing to do so could only come at the detriment of mutual relations with North Macedonia, where delays have already resulted in a massive brain drain and have even sparked nationalism in the recent past.

It is not too late to change this course and Bulgaria can still set a positive example by supporting the efforts of its neighbour to join the EU. Doing so will not undermine your attempts to clarify the issues with North Macedonia. On the contrary - it lays the required foundation of mutual trust on which a long-term reconciliation can be reached, for both countries in one Union.

Yours sincerely,

**Leonie Martin**  
President, JEF Europe

**Samet Shabani**  
Acting President, JEF North Macedonia