

European issues  
n°499  
22<sup>nd</sup> January 2019

Nikola DIMITROV

# From a common vision to concrete achievements: towards United Balkans in a United Europe

*"Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity."*

Robert Schuman

Nearly 70 years have passed since the Schuman Declaration was presented by French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman on 9 May 1950- the day which we celebrate each year as Europe Day. Far more than a symbolic reminder of the vision of a united Europe, it remains a lighthouse that offers guidance to this day. The most recent example of its resilience comes from the Balkans.

In June 2018, [an agreement was signed between Greece and Macedonia](#) on the settlement of the name issue and the establishing of strategic partnership between the two countries. It represents a concrete achievement, made possible by a series of confidence building meetings and actions, as well as intensive negotiations, aimed at building an atmosphere of friendliness, deepening the mutual confidence between our two countries and creating a favourable context of cooperation. We found a common ground in our joint dedication to a common future. Setting aside a history of walls and fences built by misunderstandings and distrust, we chose to focus on a future built on the foundations of trust and collaboration. We were driven by a vision of a cooperative, peaceful and prosperous region integrated in a cooperative, peaceful and prosperous European Union.

In addition to settling the differences over the name issue, the agreement also stipulates a strategic partnership between the two countries. For long Greece has been one of our most important trading partners and investors. We envisioned the strategic partnership as a concrete roadmap for boosting our existing economic, cultural and general socio-political cooperation, as well as creating and grasping new opportunities for collaboration in all spheres, to the benefit of all our citizens. In this process, we followed the

example of the founding fathers of the EU aimed to transform age-old fights for European hegemony into cooperation and peaceful competition, and used the promise of the Coal and Steel Community, and the Common Market, to forge a promise of peace, prosperity and freedom.

Our efforts stemmed from the inevitability of cooperation as neighbours, the regional context and the European spirit, but also from the awareness of the uncertainty and unpredictability of our deeply interconnected world. As the then Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias said during one of our multiple meetings "your stability and development feeds our stability and development, just as our stability and sovereignty feeds yours". Most of all, it was clear to us that this called for a more responsible approach on both sides- one which is primarily concerned with offering real prospects for a bright future for our peoples, and our societies.

The commitment and patience of the United Nations Special Representative for the naming dispute, Matthew Nimetz has served as an important anchor to the process. He has described the agreement as historic and as one which opens the door to a new relationship between the two countries and to a firmer basis for peace and security in the Balkans. Similar acknowledgements

## From a common vision to concrete achievements: towards United Balkans in a United Europe

---

and commendations have arrived from numerous world leaders and diplomats. UN Secretary-General António Guterres applauded the determination and demonstration of leadership in bringing this long-standing dispute to an end. The President of France Emmanuel Macron has described the Agreement as a result of courage, and one which is good for the two countries, the whole region and Europe—a statement that German Chancellor Merkel has also declared. Federica Mogherini described the day of signing in Prespa as a “historic day for the Balkans and Europe”. Alike Federica Mogherini, we also hope that it will indeed serve as a message of hope and peace not just for the two countries involved, but also for all the Balkans and for our entire continent.

Indeed, unlike the sunny and bright day back in June 2018, when the agreement was signed, this process has been far from smooth. Following the [ratification of the agreement in the Macedonian Parliament on 11th January last](#), now the completion of the process is in the hands of our Greek neighbours. [The vote is expected to take place on 24th January next](#). However, in both complex and less complex situations, we were propelled forward by the dedication to this process on which our strategic goals depend: fully fledged membership in NATO, and start of the accession negotiations with the European Union in 2019. We look forward to this year as one in which we will be able to celebrate concrete results in reaching both of these objectives. There is no bigger patriotism than taking responsibility and vision for your own future. We are doing that courageously and decisively. De Gaulle said<sup>[1]</sup> that patriotism is when love of your own people comes first; nationalism, when hate for people other than your own comes first. His words remain a true inspiration and guiding force.

Domestically, offering a prosperous future to our citizens remains a key objective. Taking decisive and bold reform steps internally will be a key focus of the year, one greatly facilitated by the progress in attaining our strategic objectives. A key message

to our citizen has been and remains that Europe is our horizon that marks our future. Conversely, without an attainable European Union and Euro-Atlantic path, the future of the country would become foggy and uncertain, with many doors closed, and many domestic problems intensified in the process.

The enlargement policy has proven itself as one of the most successful projects of the EU. It has been the most efficient tool for transformation and alignment of the societies of membership candidate countries. We remain hopeful of a dynamic and credible enlargement trajectory, as the necessary prerequisite for a sustainable reform process. The European integration of the Republic of Macedonia and the region as a whole is the key motor/energy behind efforts that will be undertaken in the fields of reform in the rule of law, credibility and accountability of the institutions, and the fights against clientelism and corruption. We emphasize that we do not see EU membership as an end in itself, but a roadmap toward reaching our destination which is clear and shared, to build our country into a stable and prosperous European democracy.

On 26 September 2017, French President Emmanuel Macron set out his initiative for a sovereign, united and democratic Europe which could gradually expand to include the Western Balkan countries. We have the “European passion” that President Macron is speaking about, we want to be part of his “Europe of tomorrow” and we will showcase our commitment through results and deliverables. We agree with President Macron in seeing Europe’s unity as one based on democracy and the rule of law on the one hand, and the single market on the other. Whilst the first represents the values of Europe, the second represents our path to prosperity and attractiveness. The Balkans of tomorrow can play an active contribution to the Europe of tomorrow. We are convinced that a united Europe cannot be truly called united if it excludes the Balkans, as much as we are aware that united Balkans remains unlikely in the absence

1. Charles de Gaulle ; Les lettres,  
notes et carnets (1951)

From a common vision to concrete achievements:  
towards United Balkans in a United Europe

---

of a united Europe. The enlargement process must not be impeded by the internal development of the Union, or vice versa - the two processes are and should be complementary. We should pursue them both in parallel, with courage, responsibility and decisiveness in the name of higher goals and ideals.

And we need to start today with making concrete steps towards their achievement.

---

**Nikola Dimitrov**

Macedonian Minister for Foreign Affairs

Retrouvez l'ensemble de nos publications sur notre site :  
[www.robert-schuman.eu](http://www.robert-schuman.eu)

Directeur de la publication : Pascale JOANNIN

---

LA FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, créée en 1991 et reconnue d'utilité publique, est le principal centre de recherches français sur l'Europe. Elle développe des études sur l'Union européenne et ses politiques et en promeut le contenu en France, en Europe et à l'étranger. Elle provoque, enrichit et stimule le débat européen par ses recherches, ses publications et l'organisation de conférences. La Fondation est présidée par M. Jean-Dominique GIULIANI.