

## **Results matter**

I was in Skopje just a few weeks ago, my third visit to the capital since the launch of the high level dialogue earlier this year. I think this speaks volumes about the intensity of the contacts that are now taking place between the EU and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. You are indisputably advancing towards EU membership, having placed the EU agenda in the centre of your political landscape. This is really important: rather than give in to frustration, the Macedonian authorities have moved decisively on key reforms.

Results matter. Let me mention a few recent ones. For the first time a review of the Ohrid Framework Agreement has been adopted. The government has proposed to improve the legislative framework for elections and, on freedom of expression, to decriminalise defamation. This will send a strong positive signal to all EU member states and facilitate accession once negotiations start. Most importantly it will benefit all Macedonian citizens. Our cooperation so far, in particular through the High Level Accession Dialogue, has thus been successful. It is important now to build on this progress.

Challenges, of course, remain. Issues around reconciliation between communities are at the forefront. The Ohrid Framework Agreement remains the basis of interethnic co-existence. Recent developments, however, have shown that the situation is still fragile and needs to be consolidated. Political leaders have shown they understand that this will ensure long term stability, necessary for the reforms to continue, for economic growth and for further progress towards the EU. The search for identity should not drag you into the past but should focus on your path to the future by taking into account not only your aspirations but also the aspirations of your neighbours. And those common aspirations are enshrined in good neighbourly relations.

I strongly believe that the opening of accession negotiations would consolidate the reforms and ensure their sustainability. That is the argument I am making to all EU member states.

I believe a solution to the name issue can be found between the two neighbours in the same spirit and based on the same core values that underpin the European Union from its beginnings over 60 years ago to today.

The year 2012 has shown the right way to go forward: to face the challenges and to focus on results. Let us continue on this path together to build our common future.

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