



**REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA
President**

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**Address by the
President of the Republic of Macedonia,
His Excellency Dr. Gjorge Ivanov,
at the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria**

Sofia, October 7, 2015

**Distinguished participants,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is an honor for me to address the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria, in the company of people who dedicated themselves to the great European and Euro-Atlantic project.

Sixty years ago, in 1955, when the leaders of the communist regimes of the seven Central and Eastern European countries led by the Soviet Union signed the Warsaw Pact, they never even imagined that their pact would dissolve after only 35 years. They never imagined that one day, their countries would become fully fledged NATO members, and that NATO would hold one of its Summits in the very city where they signed the Warsaw Pact.

As far as I know, the debate on the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in Bulgaria was initiated by our host today, Dr. Solomon Passy. The first time I heard about him was while I was a young intellectual living the last days of Yugoslavia. At that time, I followed and studied with great enthusiasm and curiosity the processes of democratization and liberalization of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The positive experiences from the Round Table in Bulgaria were especially interesting in this sense; A round table that included the government, but also the entire Bulgarian opposition, and especially the well known Zhelyu Zhelev who was not only the frontrunner, but also a moving force of the democratic processes that took over the Republic of Bulgaria.

It is in that historic Round table that the young Solomon Passy participated, and the same year he submitted a proposal for the membership of Bulgaria in NATO and the European Union. Let me remind you that at that time, Macedonia and Bulgaria were still divided by the Iron Curtain.

However, even back then, the European Union demonstrated its power to attract. Many of us believed in Europe as a peace project, or what I often refer to as the *Pax Europeana*. Today, the strongest confirmation that the European Union deserved its Nobel Peace Prize is migrants and refugees. To them, Europe is a place of peace, security, stability and good governance, a symbol of good and prosperous life.

In this turbulent period, the Republic of Macedonia was still part of a federation of states that formally did not belong to the East or to the West. And yet, since the first day of our independence, we knew very well where we naturally belong – to the great European and Euro - Atlantic family. All parliamentary parties in the first democratic Assembly advocated democratization, European and Euro - Atlantic of the country.

This is the period when our acquaintance with Solomon Passy happened. When in 1993, he planned the establishment of an Atlantic Council of Macedonia; I organized a meeting between him and the Macedonian Minister of Defense. Destiny wanted our friendship to start and to be crowned by the Atlantic Council. At that time, Dr. Passy and I were both enthusiasts with great ideas, and now we are optimists with a lot of experience.

Formally, on December 23rd 1993, the Macedonian Assembly adopted a decision for the membership of the Republic of Macedonia in NATO. This historic decision was backed not only by the political parties, but by the entire Macedonian society, regardless of ethnic, religious or any other affiliation.

This unity that we maintained until this day helped us walk successfully through the hardest part of the European and Euro-Atlantic road that was, and still is full of blockades.

The Republic of Macedonia was one of the first countries to support the "Partnership for Peace" initiative, whose member we became on November 15, 1995. Within this Partnership, we achieved three things. First, we started reforming and adapting to NATO criteria. Second, we strengthened our security relations with the Alliance. Thirdly, we established good military cooperation with the countries in the region and above all, with our neighbors.

In 1996, we were admitted to the North Atlantic Cooperation Council that was later transformed into the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council – EAPC.

During the conflicts in Yugoslavia, when NATO presence was necessary to calm down the region, we cooperated closely with our NATO partners. We made available our resources, our land and air corridors, our training fields. During the Kosovo crisis, we showed solidarity and gave refuge to over 350.000 Kosovan refugees.

In 1999, we became a candidate country for NATO membership and we were included in the Membership Action Plan. Since then, until today we completed 16 Membership Action Plans.

We implemented painstaking and fundamental in the security sector. For six years now, I have been the Supreme Commander and I can proudly say that we have built a professional, technically modern army. Our army is ready to defend Macedonia, but also to actively participate in the protection and establishment of free and democratic societies outside of Macedonia.

The Army of the Republic of Macedonia has been recognized and decorated by foreign statesmen and commanders of partner armies with over 2800 decorations. And there is a reason why.

490 Macedonian peacekeepers have participated in 9 rotations in the "Iraqi Freedom" mission. Over 2400 peacekeepers participated in the 27 rotations of ISAF in Afghanistan, including the complex PHOENIX mission. We have had 4 rotations in EUFOR and 15 rotations within the ALTEA mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Today, apart from ALTEA, our peacekeepers take part in the "Decisive Support" mission in Afghanistan and UNIFIL in Lebanon.

The Macedonian contribution is not symbolic – it is essential. At one point, we were the third ranking contributor per capita, sharing the vision for a free and democratic world. We have had more troops in Afghanistan than 90% of NATO Member States.

We share the same values, interests and priorities with NATO. We share obligations, tasks and responsibilities with NATO. But, why are we doing all of this? Because, since the first day of independence we had a vision of our future in the Alliance.

There are many reasons to this, but I will name only three:

First, NATO is the most successful Alliance in history that defeated the Warsaw pact and won the Cold War

Second, NATO has a vision of united and free Europe as an area of peace. It is part of our vision for Europe as a peace project.

Thirdly, NATO is based on the universal principles and aims contained in the United Nations Charter – the principles of democracy, individual freedoms and rule of law.

In order to realize these noble aims, NATO draws its power, vitality and strength from the principles of its functioning: unity, unanimity and solidarity when it comes to decisions of strategic and historical importance.

Dear friends,

This multitude of aims and visions, values and principles, unfortunately sunk at the NATO Summit in Bucharest in 2008. In the case of the integration of the Republic of Macedonia, NATO demonstrated indecisiveness, lack of unity, discord and incapacity to make strategic decisions.

Ever since, other centers of power in the world have been testing NATO through the case of Macedonia. In our case, many of NATO's weak points came to light.

Macedonia is a classic example of how NATO should not be treating a candidate country. But, what lesson can be learned from the case of Macedonian Euro-Atlantic integration? There are several of them.

The first lesson – NATO became hostage to the particular interests of its Member States, instead of the European and Euro-Atlantic future. Next year we are expecting the NATO Summit in Warsaw. The Warsaw Pact has dissolved. The Cold War is over. The Iron Curtain fell. And yet, there is still a very unnatural wall standing in Europe – the blockade of European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the Republic of Macedonia. This wall has managed to stay firm due to the irresponsible behavior of our southern neighbor. The elites which governed Greece until recently seemed stuck in the time of the Cold War and blissfully unaware of the new Balkan and European reality.

When it became rather clear that with the fall of Yugoslavia, the Republic of Macedonia would begin its own journey of independence, instead of supporting us, they invented the name issue in order to block us. They labeled us a threat for security and stability in Europe, although from the very beginning and using all our resources, we dedicated ourselves to contributing to that same European stability and security.

Instead of decisiveness and unity, in Bucharest, NATO demonstrated weakness and fragmentation. Member States allowed themselves to be misled by our southern neighbor. Hiding behind the principle of consensus, Greece not only put NATO in an unpleasant situation to defend positions that are in themselves indefensible, but it also brought into question the stability and security of our region.

The Alliance members are expected at all times to observe and be consistent with the aims and principles of the Organization, and not only rhetorically, but in action. With their behavior, they set an example to future members. What kind of example does our southern neighbor set? It only demonstrated that NATO can go against its own principles in order to meet unprincipled demands.

The second lesson is the one on double standards. With 16 completed MAPs, the Republic of Macedonia is holding the Guinness record. We have the most verified Army in the history of NATO, ready for the most complex missions and operations, and yet, we are not a member. The countries that lagged behind us in terms of compliance with the criteria entered NATO before us. Otherwise put, we met NATO criteria long time ago, but we still have not reached the deserved membership status. The Membership Action Plan has already lost its positive effects and has become counter-productive. Proceeding to the completion of the 17th MAP cannot be a substitute to the full integration and fully fledged membership of the Republic of Macedonia.

Imagine the following situation. Immediately after coming of age, you bought a good car and you applied for a driver's license with all your youthful enthusiasm. For 16 times, you successfully passed all the theoretical and practical tests, and yet someone, out of personal reasons, refuses to issue your driver's license. And so you keep your expensive car in the garage. Same goes for the Republic of Macedonia.

The third lesson has to do with the lack of respect for its own rules and principles. NATO, as the European Union, is based on the rule of law and international law, and its obligation is to preserve this law. However, NATO does not respect the decision of the International Court of Justice of December 5, 2011. The International Court of Justice, deliberating on the proceedings instituted by my country, decided that the Greek blockade of the integration of Macedonia into NATO is unlawful, and that obligations assumed at the international level have been breached.

Almost four years have passed since the announcement of the decision, and two NATO summits were held in the meantime – in Chicago and in Cardiff. Greece had enough time to comply with the obligations stemming from the decision.

We spent years warning that the case of the Republic of Macedonia is a violation of international law, but nobody seemed to listen. Today, NATO is paying a higher price. The lack of respect for the highest legal authorities has suspended the rule of law and has left a blank space for anarchy in international relations. The disrespect for this decision adds an argument to the side of those who contest the fact that NATO is an Alliance founded on principles, and not only naked, brutal force.

The fourth lesson is the non-valuation of the democratic will of the citizens. The support for NATO in Member States themselves is decreasing, partly due to the comfort zone offered by membership itself. It is easy to criticize NATO when you are protected by NATO's umbrella. In the UK, the level of support is 60%, in Germany 55% and only 49% in the US. For years, Greece and Turkey have been holding the record in terms of low public support for NATO. In some of the current candidate countries, public opinion is almost equally divided regarding membership.

In the case of Macedonia, the situation is dramatically different. Over 80% of Macedonian citizens fully support the membership of Macedonia in NATO. In the past 15 years, the level of our support for NATO has never been inferior to 71%, reaching even 94% at some point. Let me repeat this, 94% support for membership! This is not a sign of naïveté, but of a strong sense of affiliation. None of the political parties in the Republic of Macedonia, or all of them together, is able to gain as many votes as NATO has supporters at this moment. This is the very power of integrations – to unite and motivate the entire society in function of reaching the highest values, standards and criteria. Our partners know this very well.

Here we arrive at the fifth lesson that integrates all of the previous ones – ignoring the power of space. It appears that many have forgotten their lessons in geostrategy. In the 21st century, territorial sovereign states are facing new, non-territorial threats. The number of interstate conflicts is reduced, but at the same time, we witness the number of conflicts in the states themselves rising. Unfortunately, a great number of these conflicts take place in the immediate European neighborhood.

Today, the situation in Ukraine, failed states and ravaged societies in Northern Africa and the Middle East, create a circle of conflicts around Europe. We are facing a global threat of violent extremism and foreign terrorist fighters. In such complex circumstances, NATO's south wing has a key role in safeguarding European stability and security. And this south wing of NATO is vulnerable exactly due to the blockade of Macedonia.

Every military strategist is familiar with the principle of Sun Tzu, the author of the Art of War, who compares the army to water. Water never flows upwards; instead, it prefers the route of least resistance. We are again reminded of this by the rivers of refugees travelling exclusively via the Macedonian corridor.

Experience so far has shown that the enlargement only made NATO stronger, and never weaker. But history has also shown that enlargement is better as an instrument for prevention of conflicts rather than an instrument of crisis management. With the very fact of not placing Macedonia under its security umbrella, the Alliance is committing a strategic mistake and creates an area of lesser resistance. By postponing enlargement, NATO is creating a problem on its own territory. This problem is in the form of a vacuum space. The blockade of Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration is an example of how not to build security in the region.

Distinguished participants,

Experiences in the 20th century have shown that there can be no stable Europe without a stable Southeast Europe, and that there can be no stable Southeast Europe without a stable Macedonia. And the long-term stability of the Republic of Macedonia will be cemented by its membership in the club of democratic, prosperous, European and Euro-Atlantic nations.

Yet, we are facing a paradox. Whereas the Eastern Balkans became part of the West, NATO and EU, Western Balkans remained in the vacuum between the East and the West. In the case of Macedonia, it seems that the West does not want us in, while the East has already sent us out.

The NATO Summit in Warsaw is a historic opportunity to destroy, once and for all, the last wall dividing Europe from Europe itself. But, as I said at the beginning, if earlier, we were enthusiasts with great ideas, now we are optimists with a lot of experience. And experience shows that, unfortunately, Macedonia will most probably not become a NATO member state in Warsaw.

This will not be just another defeat for Macedonia and another diplomatic victory for Greece. This will be a defeat for the ones who took down and a victory for those who lifted the Iron Curtain. It will be a victory for the ghost of the Warsaw Pact and a defeat for NATO and the spirit of Europeanism and Atlantism, of freedom and democracy.

While the Warsaw Pact was dividing, NATO was uniting Europe. And instead of symbolically and truly putting an end to the last of the Warsaw Pact shadows next year in Warsaw, it will most probably continue to live through the blockade of Macedonia.

Imagine the difficulty of this paradox. Europe cannot consider itself as whole without the Republic of Macedonia. And instead of uniting, NATO will most probably divide Europe in Warsaw, just like the Warsaw Pact divided it 60 years ago. And this probably at the very same table.

This, unless NATO member states do something to revive the true spirit of Atlantism.

Where do we see the role of the Republic of Bulgaria in all of this?

Unlike the relations with our southern neighbor, the newest chapter in Macedonian – Bulgarian relations was successfully opened.

President Zhelev played a historic role in the international recognition of the Republic of Macedonia, but also in the prevention of the attempts to make Macedonia once again the apple of discord in the Balkans. In the wake of our independence, he rejected the unprincipled offer by Athens to discuss Macedonia without the Macedonians. And instead of entering the dark scenario concocted by Miloshevic and Samaras, Bulgaria was the first to recognize Macedonia, thus setting the example for other friendly countries. We will never forget this. This is why, as a token of gratitude, on January 15,

2010, I presented President Zhelev with the “8th of September” decoration. Also, back in 2012, a decision was made to name one of the streets of Skopje in his honor.

Only twenty days prior to that, when the visa liberalization entered into force for Macedonian citizens, together with former President Prvanov, we opened the Deve Bair - Gyueshevo border crossing. With this, we symbolically lifted the delimitation of the Iron Curtain that used to divide Europe into two parts.

The Iron Curtain disappeared from the border, but unfortunately not from the minds of some individuals on both sides of the border. This mental Iron Curtain has been burdening the relations between the two states that should cherish most friendly and close relations and feelings.

Dear friends,

I often say that we in the Balkans need to finally learn how to drive a car. Those who can drive must look forward, and therefore the windscreen is much larger than the rearview mirror which helps us look back. In the Balkans on the other hand, the rearview mirror we used to look at the past was so big that we were unable to see in front of us, in the future. This is the reason why there were so many incidents and conflicts in the Balkans.

But, if anyone knows how to drive a car in the Balkans, it is certainly Dr. Passy. I heard that his famous Trabant that became a symbol of European and Euro- Atlantic integration of the Republic of Bulgaria is now placed in a museum. This is why today, when out of habit, it happens that we look at the rearview mirror for a long while; we need more people who are good drivers, visionaries, people who are future-oriented, and this both in Bulgaria and in Macedonia.

It is time to open a new chapter in Macedonian – Bulgarian relations free from the burden of those who still have the Iron Curtain in their minds. We need a new chapter on the European future of young Macedonians and Bulgarians, for an open and prosperous Balkans.

Both the Macedonian and the Bulgarian project for the 21st century is an integral part of the European project for the 21st century. It is time to begin working on the content of these projects, instead of scratching and picking the old wounds from our common past.

It is easy to find reasons to quarrel if we start additionally entwining the already tangled knot of common Balkan history, and if we start reopening old wounds.

We are ready to sign the Agreement for Good Neighborly Relations on the basis of the Declaration for Good Neighborly Relations of 1999. But I believe that essence, and not form, is the key. The Agreement will be mere letters on paper if we do not make a change in the attitude, if we fail to understand that good neighborly relations are a two way street.

Dear friends,

What we expect is the support by our closest neighbor regarding our EU and NATO membership. We expect this because we believe in what Vaclav Havel said 15 years ago. He said that there is something higher than our national interests: the principles we stand for. Principles unite us instead of dividing us. Moreover, they are the measurement for the legitimacy or illegitimacy of our interests.

Next year, at the NATO Summit in Warsaw, we expect to see the Republic of Bulgaria finish what people like Zhelyu Zhelev and Solomon Passy began. And this is to contribute to the Europeanization of the Balkans, thus putting an end to the Balkanization of Europe.

Thank you.