

**José Manuel Durão Barroso**

**President of the European Commission**

**On the road to EU accession: partners in reforms for our  
common European future**

**2011: 10 years on the Stability and Association Agreement  
and the Ohrid Framework Agreement**

Hotel Gorica  
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be here with you today in such a wonderful place. Ohrid benefits from its rich history, the incredible beauty of its natural setting and the dynamism of its university.

The English travel writer and journalist Rebecca West wrote in her book - *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* - based on her trip to Yugoslavia in 1937 that "no one in a million Englishmen has been to Ohrid." I guess she has by now been proven wrong. And for those who have not been here yet, Englishmen or not, I strongly advise them to come.

Since Rebecca West's journey to the Balkans a lot has changed in the region and the changes went deep indeed. You underwent different transitions. And, here, the three anniversaries you are celebrating this year tell a lot on the rich journey you went through most recently.

This is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of your independence, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of your signature of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, signed here on the shores of the lake on 8 August 2001.

Over the last ten years the Ohrid Framework Agreement has proven its worth as a framework for ensuring a functioning multi-ethnic democracy. Through it your country is indeed providing an example which is of interest to countries around the world. Nonetheless, the enduring challenge of deepening mutual understanding between different communities and building a cohesive country remains. It cannot be ticked off.

This anniversary is an opportunity to take stock of progress made in the implementation of the Agreement, bring all communities of the country together and to renew the commitment to address the ongoing challenges.

This is also an occasion to remember our shared responsibility to promote democracy and human rights. The choices on the future of your country are yours but on the path to stability, democracy and prosperity you know that you can count on the European Union's continued support.

You are an example of a very efficient partnership between a country and institutions, European and international ones.

You are a place where the Ohrid Framework Agreement which put an end to internal tensions and violence was negotiated under the auspices of a joint European Union - United States mediation.

You are the place where the European Commission Rapid Reaction Mechanism created in February 2001 was first put into practice in October 2001 to finance a confidence-building programme aimed at assisting in the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement;

You are the place of the first-ever EU military operation *Concordia* in 2003 to contribute further to a stable secure environment, then of a successful EU police mission *Proxima* which aimed at the consolidation of law and order and an enhanced co-operation with neighbouring states in the field of policing.

All this shows that with a strong sense of common interest, a shared political will to act together and an efficient coordination between all the parties involved, a lot can be done for the benefit of a country and its citizens, for the benefit of more democracy and more stability. This is a lesson to be nurtured especially at these difficult times we are going through.

You are also a place with a deep rooted European vocation. Today you stand at the threshold of the Europe Union. But to get over that threshold, it will not be enough to rely on past achievements. You will need to apply the same energy and the same focus to meet the challenges of today and of tomorrow.

You are aiming at joining a peaceful Union of democracies based on reconciliation and interdependence, negotiations and compromises. Greece, Portugal and Spain, three countries which joined the European community in the 80s after freeing themselves from dictatorship, then the post-communist countries which joined in 2004 and 2006 did not miss the point. Their desire for membership was political. They regarded the European Union as a promoter of stability and democracy as much as of prosperity. And I know that it is also how you regard the European Union.

You are going to have elections. We trust they will be free, fair, transparent, and meet international standards. And I hope that the strategic direction your country has embarked on over the last decade would be backed by a strong national consensus. All political forces are needed to maintain the reform process firmly on track and to ensure political stability.

And I would like here to say a word on the name issue. There should be no equivocation; now is the time for a solution. A new climate of dialogue and trust has been established between your country and the Greek government over the last year or so. Numerous meetings have been held both under the auspices of the United Nations and directly between Prime Minister Gruevski and Prime Minister Papandreou. Mr Papandreou has assured me of his personal commitment to finding a solution. This cannot be an opportunity to be missed. As you know, it is a political reality that a solution will greatly facilitate your accession process.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The accession process is a reform process. It is a process for your country to catch up, to develop and to modernise. But it is also an arduous journey, full of challenges and difficult decisions.

To help us stay focussed on the reform path, I have proposed to Prime-Minister Gruevski that we set up a high level accession dialogue, which would take place twice a year either in Brussels or in Skopje. It would allow a sustained exchange of views and a regular monitoring mechanism on the political criteria and on the key reform benchmarks from the previous year's progress.

The first objective, the first criteria is indeed political. Functioning democratic institutions, the rule of law and the protection of human rights including minority rights, set the basis for all other policy development. Good progress was made in 2009 and again in 2010 you sufficiently met the political criteria of the EU and this allowed the Commission to recommend starting accession negotiations. However, efforts need to continue in very important areas. Further progress is necessary on political dialogue, judiciary and public administration reform, the fight against corruption and freedom of expression.

Developments in your country so far this year show that these challenges remain. It is up to the leaders of the government and the opposition, together, to move forward the reforms agenda and to ensure the functioning of the democratic institutions.

The judiciary and public administration are pillars of democracy. Their independence is a guarantee of transparency, equality and objectivity. You have established the premises of judicial independence, which is enshrined in your Constitution and in law. But more remains to be done and I am pleased that the Prime Minister has made reform of public administration a high priority and I look forward to concrete progress being made this year.

The judiciary and public administration are also vital for economic development. Your country will need to attract capital from outside the country to set you on a trajectory of higher growth. Foreign investors will come when their property rights are guaranteed and when they have access to impartial justice and a hassle-free, effective and transparent public administration.

The fight against corruption remains imperative. You have shown in the recent past your willingness to take resolute action in this field and your determination should not falter.

Media are also a pillar of democracy. Their role in informing citizens and in holding to account those in power is vital. The new forms of media are also rolling back the frontiers of democracy, as we have witnessed recently in the Arab world. Media

should be protected and journalists must be able to express their views freely whilst they also have the responsibility to meet standards of objectivity and ethics. That is why the European Commission is organizing a high level conference on Freedom of Expression and Media in the Western Balkans and Turkey in May.

Respect for the rule of law, freedom of expression and good inter-ethnic relations are indeed key for a well-functioning and cohesive society and it starts very early on. It starts at school where future generations need to learn the values of mutual respect and tolerance. Therefore I welcome the strategy for integrated education which the government is pursuing in cooperation with the OSCE. I hope that you will produce results that can again be used as an example beyond your frontiers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The political criteria come first to become member of the European Union. However, this also lays the foundations for economic progress. The enlargement process is a key factor for growth.

We will organise a high level policy conference with you to discuss the strategic policy challenges to bring your country into a higher growth path. This would also be an opportunity for you to start aligning yourself with the Europe 2020 strategy for growth and jobs.

At EU level, Europe 2020 is built around 7 flagship initiatives, which are in some aspects open to participation of enlargement countries.

Enlargement countries can engage through EU programmes most notably the 7th Research Framework, Competitiveness and Innovation Programme or Lifelong Learning programme. It is important that enlargement countries develop administrative capacities which would allow them to fully engage in these activities.

As a conclusion let me say that I am proud that the European Union is reaching out and supporting far reaching reforms based on fundamental values of democracy, rule of law and human rights.

We are working in partnership, through concrete projects and with a common objective: to enlarge the European democratic family and to build a common future of peace, stability and prosperity.

I am confident that 2011 will be in the future a year to be remembered as a turning point on your country's path to the European Union membership.

Henry David Thoreau wrote, and I quote "Let go of the past and go for the future. Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you imagined." That's what I wish for you

Thank you for your attention