

EIGHTH TRILATERAL MINISTERIAL MEETING OF BULGARIA, GREECE AND ROMANIA

Sofia, 12 November 2012

JOINT DECLARATION

We, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, Greece and Romania, met in Sofia on 12th of November 2012 for the eighth meeting in a trilateral format.

Considering that,

- our three countries are both EU and NATO members as well as neighboring countries to EU candidate, potential candidate and aspiring countries of the South-East Europe and the Eastern Neighborhood;
- Having in mind the serious economic and financial crisis in Europe and the efforts of the EU to overcome its deep social and political consequences;
- Recognizing the contribution the energy sector, including in particular energy security, has to the overall economic growth and development of our region and of the European Union, and especially the importance of the Southern Corridor in ensuring the diversification of energy supply sources and routes to the most vulnerable consumers;
- Trusting that the future of Southeast Europe lies within the EU and NATO;
- Believing that regional cooperation and good-neighbourly relations are inherent in the EU founding principles and values and remain essential components of the European integration process. The macro-regional approaches, such as the EU Strategy for the Danube Region offer substantial platforms for enhanced cooperation;
- Reiterating that the EU enlargement towards the countries of South-East Europe has a paramount role in strengthening democracy, the rule of law, stability and prosperity within the countries of our region;
- Welcoming the efforts and achievements of all countries in the region on the path of reform, aiming at achieving compliance with common EU and NATO standards and norms, and pursuing reconciliation and regional cooperation;
- Recognizing that all countries aspiring for NATO and/or EU membership or advancing towards a European perspective must fully adhere to the common European values, principles and standards.
- Acknowledging that full compliance with all accession criteria remains a prerequisite for the successful European and Euro-Atlantic integration of all candidate, potential candidate and aspiring countries;
- Noting that the speed at which the countries move towards the EU accession depends on their own achievements and progress in meeting the accession conditions and requirements as set by the EU;
- Believing that the visa liberalization was a core achievement that continues to fulfill its purpose. Among others it brings benefits - facilitating people-to-people contacts,

enhancing business opportunities and cultural exchange, and enabling the people from the region to get to know the EU better;

- Recognizing that the South Eastern Europe Cooperation Process (SEECF) is the only inclusive and regionally-owned political forum that brings together countries from the Western Balkans and their EU neighbours and recognizing the role of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and the Partnership for Peace (PfP);
- Expressing firm support for the efforts of the governments in the region to deal with the consequences of the global financial and economic crisis;
- Strongly condemning the continuing violence in Syria, which is pushing the country into a devastating civil war with grave repercussions on the entire region. The growing flow of refugees and the regional humanitarian crisis, which affect not only the neighbouring countries, but also the South Eastern Europe require strengthened solidarity and support in order to manage the situation;

we agreed that we shall

- stress that despite the severe financial, debt and economic crisis the EU is confronted with today, European integration remains the greatest achievement of the European nations and that, therefore European solidarity provides the best response to the crisis.
- consider the stability of the euro area and its impact on all Member States as a matter of priority in view of restoring the confidence and trust of the markets and investors, and ensuring the welfare of European citizens. In this regard, we believe that the process of further integration within the EMU should be open and transparent and characterized by respect for the integrity of the Single Market and for the interest of both euro and non euro area Member states;
- support the completion of the Single Market, including through fully insuring the free movement of workers in the EU, which will provide further possibilities for economic growth, competitiveness and new jobs;
- restate our support of the overall size of the multiannual financial framework for 2014-2020 as proposed by the Commission and urge all Member States to work constructively towards reaching a balanced political agreement on the proposal for the MFF 2014 - 2020 at the special European Council meeting on 22-23 November this year. In this context, underline the importance of the forthcoming meeting of the "Friends of Cohesion" Group on the 13th November in Brussels;
- fully support, as members of the "Friends of Cohesion" Group, the vision that the EU budget is a major investment tool, which significantly contributes to overcoming the negative consequences of the economic crisis and to the creation of the necessary conditions for growth, employment, competitiveness and convergence, in line with the objectives of the "Europe 2020" Strategy. In this sense, an adequate financing of the Cohesion policy, but also of the Common Agriculture Policy, is indispensable;
- coordinate our efforts for diversification of energy supply routes and sources and for developing modern networks and infrastructures in energy, transport and telecommunications, consistent with the objectives of Trans-European Networks;
- commit to strengthen our energy infrastructure to address the structural imbalances across our continent and to thus promote a liquid and functional internal market;

- encourage the development of cross-border energy projects, including natural gas interconnectors, while emphasizing the role of Energy Community in South Eastern Europe;
- promote our expectation that the Justice and Home Affairs Council will comply with the commitment taken at the highest political level by the European Council and will adopt the decision regarding the timely accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Schengen area. The full readiness of both countries to join the Area has been repeatedly confirmed by the European Council, the European Parliament and the Commission and therefore there are no grounds for the delaying the adoption of the decision;
- work together with a view to promoting sustainable growth at the Black Sea, in line with the goals of the Integrated Maritime Policy, and continue to support the development of a strategic approach on maritime affairs in this region;
- coordinate, wherever possible, to enhance cooperation and provide mutual support for candidates for high level positions in the EU agencies or other type of candidacies;
- meet regularly and discuss all issues of mutual interest that could contribute to the realization of the European and Euro-Atlantic perspective of the region;
- support the regional ambition for EU membership of all states based on the continuous, consistent and irreversible progress in economic and political reform and on the fulfillment of the necessary conditions and requirements; with this regard we will share our expertise in the field of European and NATO integration with the aim of assisting the candidate, potential candidate and aspiring countries to further advance on the way to NATO and/or EU membership. The current difficulties facing the EU should not weaken the dynamics of the enlargement process; on the contrary, promoting the European integration of the Western Balkans can and should, indeed, become part of the solution to the crisis;
- support the Eastern Partnership (partner) countries in their efforts to implement the ambitious objectives of the *Roadmap to the Vilnius Summit*, in order to consolidate the process of political association and economic integration; actively contribute to the strategic debate on the future of the Eastern Partnership ahead of the Vilnius Summit;
- support the advanced partner countries, such as the Republic of Moldova, in swiftly finalizing the negotiations for the Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, as well as the visa liberalization process, as soon as all the necessary conditions are met;
- Continue to actively promote an enhanced regional cooperation at the Black Sea and support for increased involvement of the EU in the region. The Black Sea Synergy is the appropriate framework for addressing common challenges and opportunities through sectoral partnerships, within the ENP;
- intensify the consultations and cooperation on elements of shared interest in the CFSP and CSDP areas in the context of pooling and sharing of capabilities and regional emergency and crisis response mechanisms;
- jointly promote good neighbourly relations, contributing to peace, stability, genuine reconciliation and modernization in the region. On the other hand, we condemn phenomena such as extreme nationalism and xenophobia. In this respect, we recognize the essential role of education, social development and cultural exchanges; with this regard initiatives are needed involving educational and research

institutions, civil society, the media and other non-governmental players, with the aim of raising the public awareness of the benefits of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration;

- support the role of the EU Strategy for the Danube region as a platform serving the common purpose of bringing the countries of the regions closer to the EU;
- express full and firm support for the existing EU visa free travel for the countries of the Western Balkans, taking into account that the large majority of them visiting the Schengen area are *bona fide* travelers, and for the proper measures to be taken to address the concerns of EU partners on an alleged abuse of that right.
- work for the further development of cross-border cooperation in order to strengthen the territorial cohesion of cross-border regions taking full advantage of the available EU funds. We are committed to promote the implementation of joint projects, including in the areas of development of local employment, labour market integration, education, culture, shared use of human resources, etc.;
- further strengthen the regional cooperation on the basis of the principles of inclusiveness and regional ownership; actively participate in regional cooperation initiatives focusing on projects of common interest, particularly in the fields of transport, energy and environment, in view of fostering economic development and improving the economic and energy security of the region; promote all of the above by advancing the European integration of the Western Balkans by means of concrete initiatives, such as the Greek Agenda 2014 and the organization of a Summit meeting of the Western Balkans during the Greek rotating Presidency of the EU Council in the first half of the 2014;
- promote the importance of the macro-regional approach, in particular the EU Strategy for the Danube region, for boosting the economic development, with the view of connecting the Danube and the wider Black Sea region by exploring synergies among priority areas of relevant importance;
- encourage in light of the events in the Middle East and the seriousness of the situation in Syria, the efforts on a EU level to strengthen solidarity and support for the efforts of the Greek government in fighting the illegal migration and addressing the challenges of the asylum and return policies in an increased migration pressure at the external border of the EU.
- promote a closer cooperation among the three Member States in order to ensure the highest standards concerning the security of the EU external borders in the region;
- express support for the mission of the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States Lakhdar Brahimi.
- strongly encourage all Syrian opposition groups to elaborate and unite around a clear political platform for an inclusive Syrian-led political transition leading to a democratic, pluralistic and secular state that guarantees the rights of all its citizens regardless of ethnic, religious and other affiliations.

Sofia, 12 November 2012

Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria

Mr. Dimitris Avramopoulos, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic

Mr. Titus Corlăţean, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania