

## **Joint Statement**

The Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania, the Republic of Bulgaria, and the Republic of Macedonia, Ditmir Bushati, Daniel Mitov and Nikola Poposki, met in Skopje on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015 and exchanged views on issues of common interest.

The Ministers expressed their strong belief that there is no alternative to the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans. They shared the view that a strong commitment to the values of democracy, human rights, rule of law, and good neighborly relations in the region will enable a common future in a Europe whole, free, and at peace.

The Ministers stressed that the respect for territorial integrity, sovereignty, and good-neighborliness is of fundamental significance for the long-term stability and security of the region.

Highlighting the long-standing contribution of the Republic of Macedonia to NATO's operations, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Bulgaria voiced their support for the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Republic of Macedonia with a continuous commitment to the accession process and in compliance with the criteria, as outlined in the Wales Summit Declaration of 2014. NATO's "Open Door" policy remains a powerful instrument to stabilize the Western Balkans and to counter current security risks stemming from instability in adjacent regions to the East and to the South. The Euro-Atlantic aspirations of countries of the region should not be undermined by third parties. The Ministers agreed on the need to continue cooperation in countering common threats to regional stability, including violent extremism, and voiced their concern over the unfolding humanitarian crisis as a result of the increased flow of migrants to the region.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria reiterated his country's position in support of the European integration of the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Macedonia, and expressed readiness to assist the efforts of both countries to fulfill the necessary criteria and conditions on their path towards full EU membership.

The Ministers underlined the necessity for improving transport, energy, and infrastructure connectivity throughout the region in order to ensure sustainable economic development, foreign investments and better competitiveness of their economies. In particular, they agreed to further collaborate to develop the infrastructure along the Pan-European Corridor VIII. The Ministers noted that better interconnectivity between the region and the EU is key to sustainable economic growth and prosperity of the region as a whole.

The Ministers wished a successful Chairmanship of the Republic of Bulgaria of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) and a fruitful Chairmanship of the Republic of Macedonia of the Central European Initiative (CEI). The Ministers are looking forward to the upcoming SEECP and CEI ministerial meetings at the end of September 2015 in New York.

Skopje, 24 August 2015