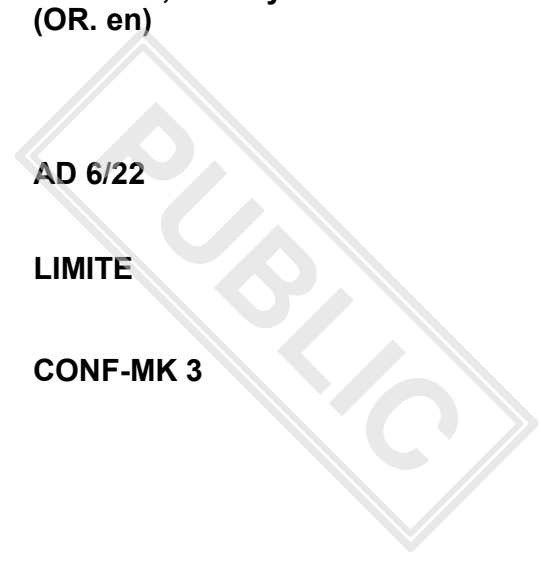


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**ACCESSION DOCUMENT**

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Subject: GENERAL POSITION OF NORTH MACEDONIA  
Political Meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference on the Accession of  
North Macedonia to the European Union (Brussels, 19 July 2022)

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**General Position – Opening Statement of North Macedonia  
for the Political Meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference  
on the accession of North Macedonia to the European Union**

**Brussels, 19 July 2022**

1. On behalf of the citizens and the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, it is an exceptional honour for me to have the opportunity to address, in the Macedonian language, today's long awaited and well-deserved intergovernmental conference opening the negotiations for the accession of North Macedonia in the European Union.
2. Today, North Macedonia begins the last stage of its long journey towards full membership of the European Union. This intergovernmental conference operationalizes the Council decision of March 2020 and opens the process of admission of North Macedonia and its citizens into the big European family, into our common home, the European Union, as our multi-decade strategic goal.
3. North Macedonia formally applied for membership in 2004 and gained candidate country status in 2005. Ever since October 2009, the European Commission has recommended to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia, and the Council confirmed its recommendations with a unanimous decision in March 2020.
4. This day is historic for us. We are taking the crucial step on the way to achieving the three-decade generational dream of the vast majority of our citizens. Dozens of our state leaders, political representatives, the civil sector, academic and scientific workers, businessmen, journalists and media workers, and thousands of state officials have tirelessly worked to make this dream a reality. They all have a part in what we have achieved so far. We dedicate this day to all of them, we thank them for their support and efforts, and we pay respect for all the work they have done.

5. Enlargement is undoubtedly one of the most successful policies of the Union. The process of unification of the European continent began with the accession of 13 countries from Central and Southeast Europe, and it will not be completed without the integration of the countries of the Western Balkans into the EU. The enlargement policy most directly contributes to the maintenance of peace and stability in our region, to the improvement of democracy, the rule of law and the protection of human rights and freedoms, and to the strengthening of the competitiveness of our economies. North Macedonia made a strategic decision to join the Union, because we are deeply convinced that it is our future, to which there is no other valid alternative.
6. North Macedonia shall continue to invest and contribute to the common future, as a partner that the EU can rely on in good times and in bad. Russia's aggression against the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine has clearly shown that nothing is given once and for all and that all threats to the peace, stability and security on the continent must be jointly addressed.
7. Civilizationally, geographically and historically, North Macedonia belongs to the European family. We have a representative cultural, historical and natural heritage and a vibrant cultural scene that will enrich the diversity of the Union with our membership. As a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional functional democracy, we are building a society for all. Through the Ohrid Framework Agreement and subsequent constitutional amendments, North Macedonia created an advanced model that ensures equality in the realisation of the cultural, linguistic and identity rights of the communities, making it an example of a successful unitary multi-ethnic state on the European continent.
8. North Macedonia does not have an open territorial dispute with any neighbour, and fully implements its obligations from the Stabilisation and Association Process. We constantly and decisively promote good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, and constructively and proactively participate in all regional organisations and initiatives.

9. North Macedonia has unequivocally confirmed the determination to overcome the challenges and to improve the relations with the neighbours by concluding the Prespa Agreement with Greece and the Agreement on Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation with Bulgaria. We remain sincerely committed to their effective implementation, in good faith, and contributing to further building mutual understanding, trust and respect. We expect the same from our neighbours and partners.
10. In that sense, we unreservedly accept the Union motto, "United in diversity" and guided by it, we also understand good neighbourliness both as respecting and honouring distinctiveness and diversities.
11. During the entire process of accession negotiations, North Macedonia expects unconditional respect for the dignity and the distinctiveness of the Macedonian people and their linguistic, identity, historical and cultural traits. North Macedonia shall not accept a discussion on issues that encroach upon the linguistic, historical and cultural identity of the Macedonian people, as well as bilateral issues that are not directly related to the EU acquis and the Copenhagen criteria to be benchmarks for the opening and/or closing of the negotiating chapters and clusters.
12. When concluding any agreements, contracts and documents between North Macedonia and the European Union that contain a language clause listing all the official languages of the EU, such as the status agreement with Frontex, they shall be signed with the Macedonian language listed in the language clause, without any explanatory notes, additions or footnotes.
13. In the course of the accession negotiations and until their completion with the conclusion of the Treaty on Accession, and after the admission of North Macedonia to full membership in the EU, North Macedonia shall not accept to discuss any solution for the Macedonian language other than the one stated in the Negotiating Framework. With the admission of North Macedonia to full membership in the EU, the Macedonian language should become one of the official languages of the EU.

14. In this regard, North Macedonia undertakes the obligation to produce translations of the EU acquis in the Macedonian language in good time before accession.
15. The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia agrees that another intergovernmental conference completing the opening phase of the accession negotiations be held upon the entry into force of the amendment to the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia with a view to include in the Constitution its citizens who live within the borders of the state and are part of other peoples, such as the Bulgarian people, the Croatian people and the Montenegrin people, in line with its internal procedures. The commitment to amend the Constitution is an authentic initiative of citizens of North Macedonia and the government accepts it as a contribution to further advancing the highly established standards and mechanisms for respecting the rights of communities, as well as with a view to enable the holding of another intergovernmental conference, without further delays or additional decision by the Council of the EU, in order to complete the opening phase of the accession negotiations.
16. Throughout the accession negotiations, North Macedonia expects the Union to remain committed to the enlargement policy and to the fulfilment of the commitments of the Thessaloniki Agenda, and the subsequent declarations from the summits in Sofia, Zagreb and Brdo. We remain resolute to make an effective contribution and expect the practical application of the enhanced enlargement methodology to confirm its basic objective of dynamizing the accession negotiations, accelerating the irreversible democratic transformation of our societies, our economic convergence and the reduction of disparities with the EU. In this context, North Macedonia welcomes the conclusions of the European Council from 23-24 June 2022 that call for acceleration of the accession process and advancement of the gradual integration between the EU and the Western Balkans already during the enlargement process.

17. North Macedonia is ready to fully adopt the EU acquis in its internal legal order and to build efficient administrative and judicial capacities to ensure effective application and enforcement. By signing the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) in 2001, as the first country in the region, North Macedonia assumed the obligation to gradually align its legislation with the EU acquis. Starting from 2006, North Macedonia adopts and updates the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis, achieving already now a high level of compliance of around 45%. Accession negotiations will only be an additional incentive to deepen and accelerate the integration into the EU Single Market and the full transposition of the acquis into the national legal and institutional system.
18. The conclusion of the SAA was of exceptional importance for the European integration of North Macedonia. The SAA established a formal political dialogue framework, at bilateral and regional level, a free trade zone with the EU, and also ensured economic, social, educational, scientific, technological, energy, environmental and cultural cooperation, through continuous legal harmonisation and administrative capacity building. The SSA will remain in force until North Macedonia accedes to the Union.
19. Through the SAA, EU has become the main trading partner of North Macedonia. The total trade exchange increased by 744% from 2002 to 2021. Macedonian economy is structurally inextricably linked to the EU economy, not only in terms of trade but also in direct foreign investments and business ties.
20. All relevant institutions in North Macedonia are fully prepared to contribute to the efficient and effective implementation of the screening and to continue further the alignment of the national legal framework with the EU standards. Today's opening of the accession negotiations contributes to the renewal of the collective enthusiasm in the administration, most directly encourages reforms and will increase the confidence of the society in the purposefulness and the certainty of the accession process.

21. For years, North Macedonia has demonstrated that it is a reliable partner of the Union, fulfilling its obligations thoroughly and vigorously, both in terms of reforms and with an appropriate contribution in dealing with global challenges, such as the migrant crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian military aggression against Ukraine. Motivated to make an even greater contribution, we applied and were given the trust to take the chairmanship of the OSCE in 2023.
22. North Macedonia has strongly condemned the Russian military aggression against Ukraine and the undermining of its territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence. Unequivocally we demonstrate our support to the EU positions by adopting and implementing specific decisions, achieving 100% compliance with CFSP. We are resolved to continue the contribution as a NATO member, as a fully compliant country with the EU CFSP and CSDP and as a future full-fledged member of the Union.
23. EU funds were and remain a driving force for change, and a catalyst for the reforms. Their three-decade usage gives visible effects in the harmonisation of national legislation, strengthening of institutional capacities, as well as in the construction of significant infrastructure projects, which factorize North Macedonia's geographical position in the heart of the Balkans.
24. North Macedonia expects that the new IPA III Programme and the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans 2021-2027, as well as the Green and the Digital Agenda will significantly accelerate our infrastructural and socio-economic development and reduce economic disparities, both at national level and vis-a-vis the EU.
25. North Macedonia is grateful for the support and assistance it receives from EU to deal with the prolonged pandemic caused by COVID-19 and its health and socio-economic consequences. We trust that EU will stay with us in addressing these critical challenges, allowing access to relevant Union mechanisms and instruments.

26. In the course of the accession process, the Government of North Macedonia adheres to the principles of transparency and inclusiveness of all social actors, and remains determined to consistently practice that approach during the negotiations. It considers essential to constantly deepen and advance the dialogue, cooperation and partnership with the civil society sector and other stakeholders, enabling their proactive involvement in the policy making and decision-making processes related to the accession negotiations.
27. The accession negotiations and North Macedonia's progress in the process will be subject to regular reporting by the Government and monitoring by the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia. Thus, this process will gain full legitimacy and will become the property of all citizens of North Macedonia.
28. Aware of the need to respond to and prevent the spread of fake news, misinformation and disinformation, North Macedonia is fully prepared to openly, clearly and promptly communicate with the public about all stages of the accession negotiations and unequivocally communicate the benefits and obligations arising from it.
29. North Macedonia is aware that the duration of the accession negotiations will depend primarily on the implementation of the necessary reforms in a thorough and vigorous manner and on the preparedness to fulfil the obligations of membership, as well as on the ability of EU to be able to support and deepen its own development, guaranteeing its capacity to integrate new members. In this respect and taking into account the assessment of the European Commission from its last Annual Country Report from 2021, regarding the fulfilment of political and economic criteria as well as the ability to assume the obligations of membership, North Macedonia aims to be fully prepared to assume the obligations of EU membership by the end of 2030 in order to become an EU member state by the beginning of the next EU budget period.
30. May we have successful beginning of the accession negotiations! We shall walk this path together, and I am sure not so far from now, together we shall rejoice the membership of North Macedonia in the European Union.