

José Manuel Durão Barroso

President of the European Commission

**Remarks by President Barroso after his
meeting with Prime Minister Nikola
Gruevski**

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Press Point

Ohrid, 9 April 2011

I was pleased to meet Prime Minister Gruevski today.

We discussed a number of important issues regarding the accession path to the European Union.

2011 is a very important year for the whole region. The countries should spare no effort in creating a positive climate for enlargement.

You celebrate several anniversaries this year: the 20th of independence, the 10th of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and the 10th anniversary of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. So it already is a special year for you.

As a sign of the Commission's continued commitment, I agreed two concrete steps with the Prime Minister today:

1. The establishment of a High-Level Accession Dialogue, which would take place twice a year, to speed up the implementation of needed reforms.
2. An Economic Policy Conference that addresses strategic challenges.

It is important that your country maintains its reform agenda.

It is absolutely important that Skopje is an active part of this dynamic. The country has to maintain the momentum of its own reform agenda.

Otherwise there is a growing risk that the country could fall behind in the accession process. It is also essential that the name issue is solved.

More specifically, I pointed to the need for progress on political dialogue, the judiciary and administration reform, and the fight against corruption.

I also outlined our ideas to step up efforts for a comprehensive and joint monitoring of the process to bring the EU agenda back to a prominent place. The EU should take the center stage in your political debate.

For that to succeed there must be a consensus on the country's strategic objectives among all actors, a sort of "historic agreement". We need functioning institutions and a true culture of compromise. I therefore appreciate the dialogue initiated by President Ivanov.

In the same vein, it is crucial that the forthcoming elections are conducted in full transparency and in line with international standards.

I also stressed that freedom of expression is key and that journalists must be able to express their views freely.

The Commission does not intervene in individual cases but expects due process and the objective application of the law.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are in a very important place today, politically but also geographically.

The 10th anniversary of the Ohrid Framework Agreement is an opportunity to take stock of progress made in its implementation, bring all communities together and renew the commitment to advance this country on the track to Europe.

The EU's commitment to your European future remains very firm. You are part of the European family. We want you to move towards membership. EU membership is the gateway to stability and prosperity.

But to succeed with this, all political actors have to rally around this vital project and do their part. That is true leadership!