**PRESIDENT IVANOV AWARDED HONORARY DEGREE BY LOMONOSOV MOSCOW STATE UNIVERSITY**

The President of the Republic of Macedonia, Gjorge Ivanov, paid a visit to Moscow on 9–11 February, where on the occasion of celebrating the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Macedonia and the Russian Federation he was awarded with an honorary degree by the Lomonosov Moscow State University. He then delivered as lecture on the historical, spiritual and cultural ties between the two nations before the professors and students of this reputable university.

As part of the ceremony, President Ivanov presented Evgeny Suhanov, Head of the Civil Law Department of the Moscow State University, and Elena Verizhnikova, a leading expert on the Macedonian language in Russia, with a Medal of Merit for their contributions to promoting Macedonian-Russian relations.

During his stay in Moscow, President Ivanov also met His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church.

**PRESIDENT IVANOV DISCUSSES EU AND NATO INTEGRATION DURING VISIT TO CZECH REPUBLIC**

The President of the Czech Republic, Miloš Zeman, Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov paid an official visit to the Czech Republic on 27 February. At their meeting in Prague they tabled Macedonia’s European integration and the economic cooperation between the two countries. President Zeman confirmed on that occasion that the Czech Republic supported Macedonia’s European and Euro-Atlantic integration and said he was confident that Macedonia would gradually join the great families of countries of the EU and NATO. In the best interest of the future cooperation, the two presidents stressed the need for closer cooperation in the fields of energy, mining, traffic and trade, and underlined the good cooperation in the areas of culture, education, sport and tourism.

During his stay in Prague, President Ivanov also visited the St Vitus Cathedral accompanied by the Archbishop of Prague, Dominik Duka, and ended his visit with a working dinner with Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka.
A delegation of the Macedonian Government led by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski paid a working visit to the Republic of Austria and the Federal Republic of Germany on 18-20 February.

In Vienna, Prime Minister Gruevski had a meeting with Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann, at which the two officials confirmed the excellent bilateral relations and cooperation and tabled ways in which to promote economic cooperation further. Prime Minister Gruevski also visited the Vienna General Hospital (Allgemeines Krankenhaus der Stadt Wien) and the Ludwig Maximilians University Clinic in Munich, where concrete cooperation in certain areas was agreed upon. In Vienna and Munich, Prime Minister Gruevski participated in the Invest in Macedonia Business Forums, organized by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and Financial Times, and presented on that occasion the possibilities for investment in Macedonia before renowned businessmen.

The government team also visited Linz and promoted the conditions for investment in Macedonia and the possibilities for cooperation with the business community of Upper Austria before local businessmen. A meeting was also held with the Upper Austria State Minister Viktor Sigl.

Prime Minister Gruevski visited the Federal Republic of Germany on 27 February again where he attended business forums in Dusseldorf and Stuttgart, presenting the opportunities for investment in the Republic of Macedonia before representatives of a number of German companies from the automobile, infrastructure, telecommunications, tourism, banking and insurance sectors.

Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki attended the conference ‘Investment in the Western Balkans’ in London on 24 February organized by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The prime ministers of the countries of the region had an opportunity at the conference to promote the priority projects to be funded in the following period.

Prime Minister Gruevski addressed in his speech the cooperation Macedonia has so far had with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, informed about the possibilities and capacities for promoting it further, and presented the strategic projects of the Macedonian Government in building roads and railroads along Corridors 8 and 10 and in energy, emphasizing the Macedonian authorities’ dedication to attracting foreign investments as a mechanism of ensuring economic progress in the country and the region.

Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski also had fringe meetings with the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, William Hague, and EU Enlargement Commissioner Štefan Füle.
Greek Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Evangelos Venizelos, current Chair of the General Affairs Council of the EU, paid a visit to the Republic of Macedonia on 20 February as part of his Balkan tour. He held meetings with Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, Deputy Prime Minister Fatmir Besimi, Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki, as well as with the leaders of the political parties SDSM and BDI.

The issues debated at these meetings included the results of the implementation of the European agenda of the Republic of Macedonia, the High-Level Accession Dialogue as a framework for the execution of reforms in various areas, the political agreement of 1 March 2013 and the economic plan of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia. The officials also expressed satisfaction with the announcement of holding a Ministerial Summit in Thessaloniki between the EU and the EU candidate member states. As a country currently holding the EU Presidency, Greece was urged on that occasion to keep the positive momentum in the European integration of the Balkans and support the opening of membership negotiations with Macedonia. As far as bilateral cooperation is concerned, stress was laid on the need for intensifying economic cooperation and enhancing cross-border cooperation.

The Macedonian officials reiterated their commitment to continuing the name issue talks under UN auspices and stressed the need for conducting talks at a bilateral level. They also underlined the significance of accelerating the process of integration of Macedonia and the other countries of the Western Balkans into the EU, in keeping with the positive spirit of the Thessaloniki Agenda 2003.

Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski received the Rapporteur for the Republic of Macedonia at the European Parliament, Richard Howitt, in Skopje on 13 February. They tabled at their meeting the European integration of the Republic of Macedonia, the reforms and measures being carried out for the purpose of meeting required standards, and the country’s integration process in general, and agreed that the European Commission’s positive report and fifth successive recommendation for opening membership negotiations was a positive sign in the process of European integration and confirmation of the progress achieved in this regard.

Prime Minister Gruevski stressed the significance of the support that the Republic of Macedonia received from European institutions and also thanked rapporteur Howitt for the dedication and effort of the European Parliament in making sure this progress continued.

Mr. Howitt welcomed the progress of the Republic of Macedonia and emphasized the support from the European Parliament in handling challenges, stressing that it was necessary to seize all opportunities that could lead to removing the only remaining obstacle to Macedonia’s integration—the name issue.

A Macedonian delegation led by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski that also included Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki and Defense Minister Talat Xhaferi, took part in the meeting of the North-Atlantic Council of NATO and the Republic of Macedonia at NATO’s HQ in Brussels. Opinions were shared on that occasion on the achieved success in the process of Macedonia’s NATO integration in the light of the action plan for membership and the political and security issues of shared interest in the build-up to the NATO summit in Wales on 4–5 September this year.

Prime Minister Gruevski and NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen jointly concluded that the membership of the Republic of Macedonia in NATO was of mutual interest and stressed the significance of NATO’s open-door policy. Prime Minister Gruevski stressed Macedonia’s readiness to continue contributing to NATO’s international peacekeeping missions.

The government delegation also held meetings with the ambassadors of the NATO member states, which was a good opportunity for presenting the progress of reforms, including in the security sector, and certain strong arguments why the Republic of Macedonia should join the Alliance.
As part of his officials visit to the Republic of Serbia on 21 February, apart from meeting his Serbian counterpart Ivan Mrkić, Macedonian Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki also met Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić and Prime Minister Ivica Dačić. Opinions were shared at those meetings about the current political situation in the region and the possibilities for improvement. Ministers Poposki and Dačić confirmed the interest in promoting further economic cooperation and cooperation in infrastructure and energy.

The Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on mutual recognition of public documents for acquired education, and for vocational, academic and scientific titles was also signed during Minister Poposki’s visit to Serbia.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia, Nikola Poposki, paid a one-day official visit to the Slovak Republic on 27 February, invited by the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Miroslav Lajčák. This visit coincided with the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Macedonia and the Slovak Republic.

In the course of their talks, Ministers Poposki and Lajčák tabled the possibilities for promoting further relations and cooperation between Macedonia and the Slovak Republic, laying stress on the economic cooperation. The two officials also addressed the prospects of the Republic of Macedonia for joining the European Union and NATO, the situation in the region and the most significant international issues. Minister Poposki highlighted the role of the Visegrád Group as a successful example of cooperation and overcoming prejudices.

Minister Poposki also met the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, František Sebej, and the Chairman of European Affairs Committee, Luboš Blaha, at the Slovak Parliament, delivered a lecture at the Slovak Foreign Policy Association on the subject ‘The Republic of Macedonia on its Way to the EU’ and was interviewed for the reputable Slovak Pravda daily.

As part of the visit, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia and the Slovak Republic.
On 14 February, Macedonian Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki received the Members of the European Parliament from the Socialists and Democrats Group, Hannes Swoboda from Austria, President of the Group, and Richard Howitt from Great Britain, Rapporteur for Macedonia at the EP.

Macedonia’s European agenda and European integration process in 2014 were tabled at the meeting. The significance of the support from the European Parliament in this process, reconfirmed with latest EP Resolution on the Republic of Macedonia, was underlined on that occasion. In the context of the coming European elections, MEPs Howitt and Swoboda said they were confident that the new Members of the European Parliament would continue extending support to Macedonia’s process of European integration.

Macedonian Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki received the Director General for Enlargement at the European Commission, Christian Danielsson, on 6 February. Their talks focused on the EU-related reforms that Macedonia is carrying out and the steps to be taken in the following months in order to ensure a positive annual report from the European Commission on Macedonia’s progress in 2014.

Minister Poposki reiterated that Macedonia would remain committed to reforms, regional cooperation and building a positive climate and cooperation with all neighbors as part of its effort to open EU membership negotiations.

Mr. Danielsson had a meeting with PM Nikola Gruevski as well, at which the European integration as a strategic commitment of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia was tabled.

Macedonian Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki received Peter Jankowitsch, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Austria and current Secretary General of the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe, on 5 February. Mr. Jankowitsch’s working visit to the Republic of Macedonia was related to the preparations for the conference entitled ‘The European Identity and the Future of the Balkans’ to be organized by the Austro-French Centre in Skopje in May this year.

The possibilities for further cooperation with the Austro-French Centre were tabled at the meeting and opinions were shared on the relevance of the European perspective for the Republic of Macedonia and the support for opening accession negotiations with the Union.
Nikola Poposki, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia, attended the second informal meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of the SEECP (South-East European Cooperation Process) participating states in Bucharest on 18 February.

He presented in his address the commitments of the Republic of Macedonia to promoting regional cooperation and continuing the positive trend for European integration of the countries of the region. Minister Poposki confirmed that the goal of the Macedonian SEECP Chairmanship of putting the Ohrid Declaration and the working ad-hoc group in the service of the European integration and the economic growth in the region was being attained. He also underlined the need for continuous and constructive cooperation with NATO and the EU and for closer cooperation among all stakeholders in this process, primarily via economic projects and the honoring of cultural values in the creation of successful policies for the entire region.

On the sidelines of the Forum, Minister Poposki held a number of informal talks with his Balkan counterparts.

On 26 February, Macedonian Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki received a German parliamentary delegation that paid a 2-day visit to the Republic of Macedonia on the occasion of the commemoration of the anniversary of Macedonian President Boris Trajkovski’s tragic death.

Opinions were shared on that occasion on the relations and cooperation between the Republic of Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Germany and on the significance of the German support for the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the Republic of Macedonia.

Minister Poposki emphasized that opening accession negotiations with the EU remained a top priority, which the Republic of Macedonia had continuously confirmed with tangible results and proactive steps in promoting neighborly relations and regional cooperation.

Macedonian Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki hosted a working breakfast for the ambassadors of the EU member states assigned to the Republic of Macedonia on 14 February, at which talks centered on the EU agenda reforms that the Republic of Macedonia carried out.

Minister Poposki informed on that occasion that the effort continued to meet the remaining responsibilities of the High-Level Accession Dialogue, highlighting in this regard the recent modifications to the election legislation, the adoption of the media laws and the public administration reform laws, as well as the steps taken in the field of justice, and said he was confident that in 2014 the execution of the reform agenda would intensify and regional cooperation and building of a positive climate among all neighbors would be further promoted in favor of the effort for opening accession negotiations with the EU.
The Japanese Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Takao Makino, paid a working visit to the Republic of Macedonia on 10 February within the framework of which he met Macedonian Parliament Speaker Trajko Veljanoski, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and Deputy Foreign Minister Zoran Petrov. The bilateral cooperation between Macedonia and Japan and the possibilities for promoting it further were tabled at the meeting. Congratulatory letters were also exchanged between the prime ministers and the ministers of foreign affairs of the two countries on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Macedonia and Japan.

MacEdonia Takes CEFTA Chairmanship

The Republic of Macedonia took the one-year Chairmanship of the Central Europe Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) on 1 January 2014. The Macedonian Chairmanship overlaps with the expected beginning of the implementation of the SEE 2020 Strategy, whose goal is achieving integrated growth through the promotion of regional trade and investments and policies that are transparent, predictable and non-discriminatory. CEFTA’s aim is contributing to further integration of the region into the European and global economy.

In 2014, the Republic of Macedonia also chairs CEFTA’s Subcommittee on Agriculture including Sanitary and Phytosanitary Issues.

Macedonian Foreign Ministry and French Embassy Sign Cooperation Agreement

Nikola Poposki, the Macedonian Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Ms. Laurence Auer, the French Ambassador to Macedonia, signed an Agreement on Cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia and the Embassy of the French Republic on 5 February. The subject of the agreement is holding a number of professional and specialized training courses for diplomats at the Ministry.

The agreement will be carried out in the course of 2014 by way of conducting training in four modules. The subjects of the training courses include economic diplomacy, diplomatic protocol, e-diplomacy and preventive diplomacy.

FM Poposki Attends Meetings of MFAs of EU Member States and Candidate Member States in Brussels

Macedonian Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki participated in the traditional annual meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of the EU member states and candidate member states in Brussels on 10 February. The talking point of the meeting was the Southern and Eastern Neighborhoods of the EU, the situation and challenges in the Balkans in the context of the European integration of the region, as well as the possibilities for taking preventive actions for the purpose of overcoming challenges in the neighborhood.
Your Excellency, how do you assess the relations between the Republic of Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Germany thus far and the prospects for their enhancement in the future?

Macedonia and Germany have generally positive relations which can further develop. Germany was the most significant trade partner of Macedonia in 2013. Economic cooperation, as well as cooperation in terms of culture, education, science, etc., has potential to grow further. On the political level, relations can also be further advanced. Macedonia can seek more support from Germany regarding its EU integration processes.

In December last year the Republic of Macedonia was not set a date for opening EU membership negotiations. What is your opinion on the prospects of the Republic of Macedonia for full-fledged NATO and EU membership?

It is clear that if we aspire towards stability and prosperity in the Balkans, the future of Macedonia can be only seen in NATO and the EU. In order for these prospects to be realized, efforts beyond declarative statements are needed on both sides. The accession of Macedonia doesn’t seem to be on the priority list in the EU. The negligence of the EU regarding the Macedonia-Greece issue doesn’t help the process in the long run. At the same time, political elites in Macedonia should also show genuine reform efforts in the domestic arena. It is my understanding that the pre-accession dialogue with the EU could be used more strategically to advance Macedonia’s position. In the light of the June Summit of the EU, Macedonia should show not only progress with the political dialogue, but also progress regarding the formal accession criteria.

As the founder of CSSP, a project for integrative mediation aimed at improving interethnic cooperation in post-conflict regions, how do you assess the established measures for building trust in the region of Southeast Europe?

CSSP and I personally have been engaged in Macedonia since 2005 working with state and local level institutions and political bodies responsible for the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. We are also active in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The international community should remain much more focused on the political issues in Southeast Europe rather than focus merely on technical assistance as part of the pre-assessment processes to the EU. On the other hand, efforts from the outside are difficult should there be no basic conditions on the grounds. In Macedonia for example, the failure to conduct a census in 2011 makes it difficult to work on any more substantial issues affecting the intercommunity relations.

As a well-known and recognized activist for human rights and freedoms, what is your stance on the announcements for reintroduction of the visa regime for certain Southeast European countries by the European Union?

I find this decision to be contra-productive and strongly oppose it. Further isolation of the Western Balkans can only have negative consequences on the long-term goal of EU integration.

The Federal Republic of Germany has been the most important economic partner to the Republic of Macedonia in the course of the last few years. The politics of the Macedonian Government for attracting foreign investments motivated the German companies Dräxlmaier and Kromberg & Schubert to invest in Macedonia. According to you, will this encourage other German companies to invest in Macedonia?

This is a positive development which might have multiplier effects and encourage other companies to follow this example. According to the statements of the companies, their first impressions are positive. Should Macedonia provide stable legal frameworks, I can see further positive developments in this regard.

The cooperation in the spheres of education, science and culture between the two countries has been registering an intensive growth in recent years, especially in the exchange of experiences with higher education and scientific institutions from Germany. Your Excellency, in your view, how can this cooperation be intensified and improved in the future?

I greet the positive developments in this regard. One area in which it can be further extended is perhaps the vocational education sphere. Here Germany has very positive experiences to share.
Your Excellency, this year, we mark the 20th anniversary of establishing diplomatic ties between the Republic of Macedonia and Switzerland. How do you assess the past two decades and the opportunities for further enhancement of bilateral relations?

Since Macedonia’s independence in 1991, Switzerland has been supporting transition processes in the country and has developed a trusted partnership based on mutual interests. A Cooperation Office was opened back in 1997.

The close ties between the two countries are best documented by the sizeable Macedonian diaspora, around 80,000 people, living in Switzerland which contributes to promoting bilateral cooperation as well as cultural exchanges.

In recent years, the Swiss Cooperation concentrated on two domains: rule of law and democracy as well as water and environment. The new Cooperation Strategy 2013-2016 is rooted in the spirit of the agreements of cooperation between the governments of Switzerland and Macedonia and was developed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) in close consultation with Macedonian government offices and partners, such as the civil society.

It represents a strong commitment to supporting the economic, social and political transition processes in Macedonia, building on Switzerland’s long-term presence in Macedonia and earlier achievements.

Over the years, Swiss-Macedonian cooperation has grown. Today Switzerland is the sixth largest development partner of Macedonia. The goal of the Swiss Cooperation is to support Macedonia in addressing remaining challenges in alignment with the priorities as defined by its Government for specific sectors. It focuses on three thematic domains: Economy, Water, Governance and Decentralisation. Switzerland has relevant expertise in all three domains and is confident that it can make an effective contribution. The foreseen financial commitments for the period 2013-2016 amount to 85 million Swiss francs.

Thanks to its political and economic dynamism, Switzerland contributes significantly to stability and economic well-being in Europe. This was recently confirmed by an OECD study. In this regard, what are the possibilities for more intensive economic cooperation and what is the interest of Swiss companies in making direct investments in the Republic of Macedonia?

According to OECD studies, Macedonia is very well ranked in terms of formalities for registering businesses and a favorable taxation system. These are all indicators that potential businesses and investors are looking for when they search for markets and investment destinations. Bilateral trade between Switzerland and Macedonia has an upward trend but there is still room for improvement considering the ties that exist between the two countries. As I have already pointed out, the Macedonian diaspora in Switzerland represents a large potential. At the end of the day, businesses are quite autonomous in their decisions whether they will invest or be present in a specific market. There are many areas where I think Macedonia has a lot to offer that in turn will also contribute to job creation and income generation, for example Tourism.

Switzerland chairs the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2014. Under the leitmotif “Creating a Security Community for the Benefit of Everyone”, Switzerland wants to make a tangible contribution to fostering security and stability, improving people’s lives and strengthening the OSCE’s capacity to act. What will the Swiss Chairmanship do to achieve these goals?

In more concrete terms, this means that Switzerland aims to resolve conflicts and normalize relations between conflicting parties in the long term, including in the Western Balkans and South Caucasus, through dialogue and confidence-building measures. Regarding the Western Balkans, our aim is to promote reconciliation and regional co-operation and ensure that the OSCE plays a supporting role in the implementation of the Belgrade-Pristina agreement. In addition, Switzerland will support promotion of dialogue among all communities living in Kosovo, as this will play a key role in successful implementation on the ground of current and any future
agreements between Belgrade and Priština. Work in the Western Balkans will be led by the Special Representative of the Swiss Chairmanship, Ambassador Gérard Stoudmann.

Also, considering that elections will take place in several countries of South-Eastern Europe at various levels in 2014, including Macedonia, Switzerland will support the OSCE institutions in making their contribution to free and fair elections as a prerequisite for long-term stability in the region.

To improve people’s lives in OSCE participating states, Switzerland places priority on strengthening the protection of human rights by advocating that the numerous political commitments undertaken by the participating states in the last 40 years actually be implemented.

To strengthen the OSCE’s capacity to act, Switzerland seeks to further develop the institution and to carry forward the reform process “Helsinki +40”, so that the OSCE can better react to the challenges of the 21st century. Furthermore, Switzerland aims to enhance mediation capacities within the OSCE and also to strengthen the involvement of the civil society in the work of the Organization.

Switzerland wants to give young people a voice. It has therefore launched a Model OSCE series, in which 57 young people coming from the participating states are simulating two specific decision-making bodies of the OSCE. The intention is to develop a “Youth Action Plan”, which will be presented by the 57 participating Model OSCE “Youth Ambassadors” to the foreign ministers of the OSCE during the Ministerial Council 2014 at the end of the year in Basel.

In honor of 15 February, Serbia’s Statehood and Army Day, the Ambassador of the Republic of Serbia to the Republic of Macedonia, H.E. Ms. Dušanka Divjak-Tomić, hosted a reception in Skopje on 13 February. The reception was attended by a large number of eminent representatives of the Republic of Macedonia, including Parliament Speaker Trajko Veljanovski and representatives of culture, business and academic circles, the diplomatic corps and the Serbian community in Macedonia.

In her address, ambassador Divjak-Tomić stressed the historical significance of 15 February 1835, when the first Constitution of Serbia was adopted and the foundations of modern Serbia were laid. She also emphasized the positive trend in the overall neighbourly relations between the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Macedonia, which she deemed as very good.

On 17 February, the Embassy of the Republic of Kosovo hosted a reception to mark the 6th anniversary of the newly born state. The reception was attended by numerous dignitaries, including accredited ambassadors in Macedonia, Members of Parliament, government officials, artists, intellectuals, religious leaders and media representatives.

After the intonation of the anthems of the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Kosovo, H.E. Mr. Ylber Hysa, ambassador of the Republic of Kosovo, addressed the guests with a short speech.

The Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Macedonia staged the traditional celebration of the Day of the Russian Diplomacy in Bitola on 11 February 2014. The central event was the ceremony of laying flowers at the Russian Cross monument organized by the Embassy and the Honorary Russian Consul in Bitola. In addition to diplomats from the Embassy, the Russian military attaché and Russian nationals, the event was also attended by the mayor of Bitola, the rector of the University of St Kliment Ohridski, public figures, scholars and activists from associations promoting Macedonian-Russian friendship. The Russian Embassy also hosted a reception for this occasion.
My whole life has been connected with Macedonia. In 1975, I enrolled at the Faculty of Philology at the Lomonosov Moscow State University and became part of the group of students that for the first time in the history of the University started studying the Macedonian language. I am proud that my esteemed professor Rina Usikova accepted me as her best student. Also, when in 1979 I came to Skopje and started my long internship I was lucky to get to know better academician Blaže Koneski while writing my graduation thesis under his mentorship. Koneski helped me a lot to become acquainted with the Macedonian language at a deeper level and also awakened and encouraged my interest in this beautiful country.

In 1980, I graduated with high honors and was awarded the title of a philologist of Slavic languages and literatures. Upon graduation, I worked as editor in chief and translator at the Russian State Committee for Radio and Television Broadcasting, as part of the department responsible for airing shows about Yugoslavia. Then I learned a lot from Dime Tolovski. The radio was an excellent translating experience for me. In 1994, when Russia and Macedonia established diplomatic relations, I started working for the Embassy of the Republic of Macedonia in Moscow. I had the opportunity to participate in all organizational and technical activities in the process of opening and establishing first the Representative Office and then the Embassy, in which I worked until the end of 2011. My job at the Embassy was very responsible and also very interesting and afforded me the opportunity of meeting numerous dignitaries. I am proud that I have a certificate of appreciation from the Office of the first President of the Republic of Macedonia, Kiro Gligorov, for my contribution to the preparations and organization of President Gligorov’s visit to the Russian Federation in 1997.

While working at the Embassy, I did not neglect my scholarly interest in the Macedonian language and literature, focusing particularly on the contemporary Macedonian language, lexicography, and theory and practice of translation and from a number of Slavic languages. I regularly took part in international conferences and symposiums presenting papers in the field of the Macedonian language and literature. The International Seminar on the Macedonian Language, Literature and Culture, which I attended several times, was of considerable help in perfecting my knowledge of the Macedonian language. From 2007 to 2011, I taught Macedonian language and literature at the International Slavic Institute and the State Academy of Slavic Culture in Moscow. I also compiled for my students a small Macedonian-Russian dictionary, a small Russian-Macedonian dictionary, a grammar book for beginners, as well as Macedonian-Russian and Russian-Macedonian tutorials.

However, translation has always been my main preoccupation. I was very much encouraged to pursue my interests in this field by the first Ambassador of the Republic of Macedonia to the Russian Federation, the great Macedonian poet and academic Gane Todorovski, who boosted my confidence in my creative power. It was then that I started publishing my first adaptations and translations of poetry and prose from Macedonian into Russian.

I have since published more than 100 works, translations from Macedonia and other Slavic languages into Russian and from Russian into Macedonian. I also wrote notes about most of the authors in my publications. In addition, I penned a number of articles on Macedonia in various Russian magazines and I have recently launched a new and very significant project entitled The Macedonian Novel in the 21st Century (a 12-volume edition) in cooperation with the Margarita Rudomino All-Russia State Library for Foreign Literature in Moscow.

As a translator, I try first and foremost to promote the Macedonian literature outside Macedonia’s borders but I also take steps further. In Moscow in 2010, I founded the Macedonian Cultural Centre, a regional social organization, aiming to bring the culture, history, language, art and modern living of the Republic of Macedonia closer to the Russian people. Being accredited by the Administration of the City of Moscow, the Centre has more than 100 members now who are very successful in the presentation of the Macedonia cultural values in the Russian Federation.

Some of the awards I have so far been presented with include Derzhavin (Russia, 2009), Crystal Pen (Russia, 2010), Golden Pen (Macedonia, 2010), Chekhov Medal (Russia, 2011), Grigor Prličev (Macedonia, 2011), Griboedov Medal (Russia, 2012), Blaže Koneski Medal (Macedonia, 2012) and Goce’s Thoughts (Macedonia, 2014).
**IN THE PRESS**

“Slovenia has always been an advocate for Macedonia’s Euro-Atlantic integration and has supported Macedonia’s bid for joining the EU and NATO. We wish all Balkan countries the same,” said Slovenian Ambassador to the Republic of Macedonia, Branko Rakovec.

“We are not involved in the process and are friends to both parties. However, we would really like to see this issue resolved. You have significant trade relations with this country and thousands of its citizens visit Greece so the resolution will be good for everybody,” said Serbian Foreign Minister Ivan Mrkić in his interview with the Greek Kathimerini daily.

“Macedonia has met all the required criteria for NATO membership and I hope the member states will be constructive in regard to Macedonia’s accession and will vote in favor of it,” said Sally Painter, director of Blue Star Strategies, a consulting house from Washington DC.

“Find someone to talk to on the other side and if someone says nothing can be done, I think it is simply unconstructive,” said EU Ambassador Aivo Orav in an interview with Radio Free Europe.

“Macedonia meets both conditions for NATO membership, in keeping with the formal position of the Alliance that doors are open to any European country capable of promoting the principles of the Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North-Atlantic region. Unless it joins NATO at the next summit, Macedonia should seek UN membership under its constitutional name,” said Robin O’Neill, the ambassador and first mediator in the Macedonia-Greece name dispute.

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**SIMON TRPČESKI PERFORMS IN SOFIA**

Macedonian pianist Simon Trpčeski staged a concert in Sofia on 7 February where he was received with standing ovations. He performed the Piano Concerto No. 1 for piano and orchestra by Tchaikovsky as a soloist of the Orchestra of the Bulgarian National Radio conducted by Maestro Emil Tabakov. The concert was broadcast live by the Bulgarian Radio and was later shown on the Bulgarian National Television.

**MACEDONIAN MUSIC PROMOTED AT MIDEM IN CANNES**

A presentation of Macedonian music was held at the 48th MIDEM, the world’s oldest and most significant music exhibition, conference and festival dedicated to the global music community, which took place in Cannes, France, from 1 to 4 February.

This year, MIDEM had 6,500 visitors from 3,000 leading music companies from 75 countries. About 40 conferences and debates took place focusing on the development of copyright protection systems and the new global digital sale strategies, in which the Macedonian representatives also took part.

**BEFORE THE RAIN RANKED IN TOP 100 FILMS ON MIGRATION**

Mičo Mančevski’s *Before the Rain* has been ranked in the top 100 films that best portray migration as a global phenomenon and sociological process in the recently published *The Best 100 Films on Migration* by David Felipe Arranz, a philologist and journalist, in which the portrayal of migration on the big screen is analyzed.

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*Before the Rain* has won 30 international awards, has been included in the world’s best 1,000 films ever made according to the New York Times and has won the Film of the Year title in Sweden, Argentina, Turkey and Italy.

**THE PIANO ROOM SHOWN AT EUROPEAN FILM MARKET IN BERLIN**

Within the framework of the International Berlin Film Festival, Igor Ivanov’s feature film *The Piano Room* was shown at the European Film Market, attended every year by numerous producers, distributors, financiers and festival organizers from around the world. The European Film Market is deemed as one of the most significant international film industry events.
Dr Hemery, you are the founder and Chairman of the Centre for Political and Diplomatic Studies (CPDS), established in 1993. Please tell us about the activities of CPDS and the need for its establishment? Thank you for the opportunity of talking about our work in the respected journal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Macedonia.

At the end of the Cold War, with the historic changes in the governance of Central and Eastern Europe, the UK Government offered help in the transition with a programme of exchange of professional experience in many fields, from agriculture to zoology, called the Know How Fund. We were fortunate to be asked to design and conduct Know How Fund programmes of capacity-building in the field of foreign affairs for the ten new foreign ministries of Central Europe, and, after the breakup of the Soviet Union, for the fifteen former Soviet republics. In those early days, we also provided programmes of exchange of parliamentary experience between the UK and the parliaments of the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Since then we have had the privilege of being asked by an increasing number of foreign ministries to contribute to their own programmes of professional development.

Our approach is always the same: to work with the Ministry to define clearly what their own priorities may be, and to design courses of professional development which will support their efforts; then to deliver practical experience of the highest possible quality by senior diplomats from the UK and other countries. All our courses are interactive, offering diplomats the opportunity of developing personal professional skills through simulation exercises replicating international issues in which their countries are currently engaged.

But we are the beneficiaries of this process, as well. Here in Macedonia, we have had the opportunity of developing our understanding of the complexities of international relations in the Western Balkans, in discussion with the very able diplomats of the Republic of Macedonia. Wherever we go, we learn something new which deepens our knowledge of diplomacy.

But then, as recent developments in Ukraine show, no matter how much you think you may know, events have a way of upstaging theory. That is the enduring challenge for diplomacy, and the endless fascination of our work.

As an independent institution, equipped with prominent experts, CPDS conducts a large number of different programmes and courses intended for the ministries of foreign affairs and other governmental and nongovernmental organizations and multinational corporations in Europe, Africa, Southeast Asia and Australia. What is your assessment of the courses of diplomatic training you deliver in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe?

Each country, in each region, has its own view of the world. Each government resonates uniquely with the spirit of its people. Consequently, there is no programme that is suited to all. But there are core skills common to all diplomacy – the ability to listen carefully, to try to understand the underlying dynamics of politics, to build networks of relationships, to report from post in a focused and useful way, to encourage and help to facilitate coherence in the hugely diverse connectedness between states.

The states of Central and Eastern Europe have been confronted with immense upheavals in both politics and practical administration in the last quarter-century. Some have responded better than others. But the miracle is that overall it has been managed with calm professionalism. Foreign ministries everywhere are still fortunate to attract the most able of each generation, so we always find we are working with bright, well-educated, multi-talented, forward-looking people carrying with them the hopes of their country.

The Centre also conducts training within the European Union, including for government representatives of countries that preside over the Council of the European Union. What is your experience of the contribution of this training to the success of the Presidencies of the Council? We have been fortunate to offer assistance to the preparation, so far, for nine Presidencies of the Council. Our most important contribution has been to help people to remember that their job is to be a good manager of a well-established process of EU decision-making, and to develop the skills (and so the self-confidence) to do the job well. The Presidency, for all countries, large or small, offers a terrific opportunity to develop knowledge of how the EU works in practice, to encourage more effective inter-ministerial co-ordination, and to build professional competence across government.

We have simply drawn on a large network of senior officials with first-hand experience of what works well and what doesn’t, and have designed programmes.
which attempt to transfer that experience, and which provide opportunities for officials to practise the process of doing it themselves.

The evidence, happily, is that people seem to feel that they have been enabled to do their best for their country, and for the EU, when in the hot seat.

In November, January and February, you held training at the Macedonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, organized in cooperation with the Embassy of the United Kingdom in Skopje, as part of the project “Strengthening the Capacities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.” Dr Hemery, how do you assess this training and the need for further diplomatic training in the Republic of Macedonia? It has been a privilege to contribute to this programme of professional development.

We have been impressed by the extent to which the Ministry has been prepared to release people from their duties to attend our courses. Every ministry of foreign affairs has too few people doing too much, and training is often the first casualty. The fact that our victims have turned up day after day is an indication of the commitment of the Minister and his team to this essential process of capacity-building.

We have been part of a team including the Ministry, its new Diplomatic Academy and the British Embassy in Skopje. We all have worked hard to develop a programme which addresses the core needs of the Ministry. The ten courses we have delivered have concentrated on the key foreign policy priorities of the Republic of Macedonia, and the professional skills needed to manage them effectively.

We have been impressed by the abilities of both young and more seasoned diplomats, and by their commitment to the national project of furthering productive engagement of Macedonia with the international community.

Of course, there is more to be done. Macedonia faces particular challenges on its way to integration in international institutions; that will require sensitive diplomacy. The Ministry is building its competence in digital diplomacy; that demands a fundamental reappraisal of the way in which Macedonia’s diplomats interact with the world. It is clear that Minister Poposki and his team have embarked on these missions with focused determination. We are grateful to have been given the opportunity of playing a small part in achieving their objectives.

Based on the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the renowned Centre for Political and Diplomatic Studies of London organized training for diplomats at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As part of the training, attended by 54 diplomats of the Ministry, a number of subjects were addressed, including politics, organization and management of a head office and a diplomatic mission, political analysis, reporting and briefing, negotiating and chairing skills, handling a consular crisis, strategic communication, exerting influence and developing networks, personal presentation skills and diplomatic communication.

Book authored by Vasko Naumovski was promoted at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 7 February. A keynote speech was held by Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki, who explained that the volume focused on bilateral disputes as a factor in the process of EU enlargement.

Prof. Dr. Tatjana Petruševska, the book’s reviewer, also expounded on the EU-related topic.
Belgium is always ready to give you a hand as good friends do

Dear Macedonian friends,

This year, we are celebrating 20 years of diplomatic relations, a perfect moment to look back on the excellent quality of our relations.

Over the years, our bilateral relations have considerably developed in the diplomatic, human, cultural and economic fields. There were visits at the highest level: Albert II visited Skopje when he was our King, King Philippe visited as Crown Prince, and President Ivanov was received at the Palace just after he took office. Several treaties have consolidated our legal framework and facilitated travel and trade. As for economic relations, I could mention the yearly economic mission that will take place in May, or the successful investment of Van Hool, the producer of buses near Skopje.

Belgium is known for chocolate, beer and diamonds, as well as for comic strips. Soon, we’ll bring an exhibition by the Marc Sleen Foundation. Over the years, close contacts in the cultural field have brought some of our best artists to Skopje, including Jan Fabre or Wim Van de Keybus in the field of contemporary dance for example.

Brussels, our capital, is also the capital of Europe. We fully support Macedonia’s European perspective. We are fully aware that the path towards membership is not always an easy one. Still, I would like to stress the value of the process and the importance to proceed with the needed reforms. It asks not only for important changes in legislation, but also for the implementation of the European values, that contain rights and duties for both government and citizens. Your country has been making important efforts, and we encourage you to continue, looking forward to your EU membership, but also fully adhering to the EU state of mind. We are always ready to give you a hand and to share our expertise, as good friends do.

Anick VAN CALSTER,
Ambassador of H.M. the King of the Belgians

DYNAMIC RELATIONS ARE CONFIRMATION OF SHARED VALUES

This year, the Republic of Macedonia marks a significant anniversary in its relations with the Kingdom of Belgium – 20 years of establishing diplomatic relations. Additional significance to our bilateral relations is attached by the uniqueness of the Kingdom arising from its complex political system, taking into account that the country has three official languages (French, Dutch and German, although those whose native language is German account for less than one percent), six parliaments and five governments (federal, regional and those of the communities) and a rich economy that generates some 500 billion dollars per annum. All of this makes Belgium a unique phenomenon that proves that a multiethnic and multilingual society can function successfully in circumstances of full-fledged democracy and high standards of civilized living.

The excellent relations that Macedonia has today with one of the founders of most institutions in the modern international system, such as the UN, the EU, NATO, etc., are particularly worth mentioning and are confirmation first and foremost of the thorny path our country had to walk since its independence 20 years ago. The confirmation comes with the open doors and daily contacts that we have with the Belgian institutions and officials and, of course, with the numerous bilateral activities in all areas, which ensure promotion of our country in terms of politics, business, culture, education and tourism. Several significant bilateral documents have been signed with Belgium over the past few months which pertain to home affairs, labor and social policy and culture and which will be implemented over the following period. As far as defense is concerned, at the bilateral ministerial meeting, it was decided for the first time that the Macedonian armed forces should join the military structures of the EU. More specifically, an agreement was reached that in 2014 they should become part of the EU Battle Group led by Belgium. In addition to cooperating with the federal government, Macedonia also maintains relations with Belgium’s influential regions, Flanders and Wallonia, as well as the region of its capital, Brussels.

For the purpose of completing the overall success of our bilateral relations, a diplomatic reception will be hosted later in March to mark the anniversary, while the promotion of the Macedonian rich cultural legacy this year will be carried out through several international music festivals and the organization of the Macedonian Culture Days event in a few cities in Flanders.

As far the promotion of Macedonia’s economic potentials is concerned, particularly worth mentioning are the various forms of cooperation with the chambers of commerce and a number of well-performing Belgian companies, the most significant of which is that with Van Hool, the Belgian bus-maker, which undertook the largest Belgian investment in Macedonia. In order to promote cooperation further, a number of business forums will be staged, the first of which, centering on manufacturing, will be held at the end of March, while the international tourism show held in Brussels in early February this year, at which Macedonia has its own display with top-quality promotional materials, is going to contribute to promoting further Macedonia’s tourism relations with the tourism organizations and the people of Belgium.

Belgium has an extremely well developed higher education system, as evidenced by the fact that four Belgian universities have been ranked among the world’s top 150. This year, we are going to promote our relations with some of the Belgian universities established last year by way of holding direct meetings and signing cooperation agreements to ensure exchange of know-how.

Macedonia’s highly dynamic relations with the Kingdom of Belgium this year will be one more confirmation of the values and vision for the future that our two European countries share.

Lazar ELENOVSKI, Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium