

## PRESS RELEASE

### International Prize of Peace of Westphalia 2020

#### Speech by Zoran Zaev, Prime Minister of North Macedonia

THE SPOKEN WORD APPLIES.

Dear Dr. Reinhard Zinkann, chairman of the Economic Society for Westphalia and Lippe, Dear President of Latvia Egils Levits,  
My dear friend Alexis (Tsipras),  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor and privilege to receive the award International Prize of Peace of Westphalia 2020.

It is a great honor that mine, and the name of my friend Alexis Tsipras, will be added to the long list of winners of this award, alongside renowned names such as next to Václav Havel, Helmut Kohl, Valéry Giscard; Estaing, Kofi Annan, Helmut Schmidt, the crews of the International space station, the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and others.

As the International Peace Prize of Westphalia award honors personalities or representatives of states and groups who have been particularly committed to European integration and peace in Europe, I want to share with all of you the story of two countries dedicated to Europe and peace.

In one of Europe's most beautiful landscapes, in the untouched nature of the Prespa Lakes, where the borders North Macedonia, Albania and Greece meet, on June 17, 2018, we signed the historic – Prespa Agreement.

If the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 was a turning point because it developed Europe's ability to live with religious diversity, the Prespa Agreement is a turning point for our region.

In matter of fact, even the first article of the Westphalia Peace Treaty doesn't really speak about peace, but for friendship, – "true and sincere friendship" between its signatories. That's what Prespa Agreement also stands!

With this agreement, we put an end to a dispute and a long-lasting difference that raised a wall, making the neighborly relations between North Macedonia and Greece difficult.

The issue was open for three decades. We underwent three decades of uncertainty about our future. Three decades of serious concern for unwanted consequences.

Three decades of blocked perspectives that are of key strategic interest for our country, for the region and Euro-Atlantic structures.

The future was the guiding idea throughout the process.

Both sides accepted the compromise as a friendship and as a concern for the interests of your political partner, as well as for your own interests.

That friendship was important to create an atmosphere in which we openly discussed all issues even when it seemed that there is no solution.

Throughout the process, we insisted that we are not talking about red lines. We told each other that the red lines are limiting.

Red lines put you in a box. We said - we will not put the process in the box. That is the way friends work. Focused on solutions. Building bridges, not walls!

What are the challenges if not a chance for solutions! If you do not see them as opportunities for creative solutions, as steps toward achieving our vision.

That's why Alexis and I chose to find a solution. Not to delay. Who is decorated with virtues? The one who simply prolongs the problem, or the one who accepts to solve it?

Both, me and Alexis, are fully aware that we have put our political careers at risk.

This firm determination, the willingness to sacrifice our own political careers in the name of the future, connected us and led us through the process.

When you see on the other side of the negotiations table a person focused on solutions, a person with whom you share the same political values, you have all necessary ingredients for friendly relationship and atmosphere to reach a mutual acceptable solution to the problem.

More importantly, this kind of relationship becomes motivating. It turns into friendship. Both of us, we poured this budding friendship into the foundations of the new relation between our countries. It is the most precious benefit.

We chose to leave solutions like traces behind us. Solutions for our citizens and for our societies. An example of European leadership!

We came to a solution when everyone claimed it was - impossible!

This year North Macedonia celebrates 30 years of independence, and I am happy to say that at our thirtieth anniversary, we are the thirtieth member of NATO.

That was possible because of the Prespa Agreement.

I'm honored as well, that I had the opportunity to fulfill the dream of many generations of citizens of the North Macedonia.

NATO membership was realization of our strategic goal and it is among our biggest foreign policy achievements. NATO membership is a reflection of our sovereign

choice, and testimony to our strong cross-party and societal goal to become fully integrated in the Euro-Atlantic family of nations.

Today, North Macedonia has improved security and stability, and consequently the Western Balkan region as a whole. We are committed to a vision of Balkans in 21st century, as a region of peace, stability and increased regional cooperation for economic benefit and prosperity of all citizens.

Our second strategic aim is full membership in the European Union.

I am sad to say that the last year, following the decision in March 2020, to start negotiations with North Macedonia, due to unprincipled position of our neighbor Bulgaria, the first Intergovernmental Conference didn't take place.

To our great disappointment, the EU failed to keep its promise.

Yet, we still believe that there is no alternative to the EU integration for North Macedonia. We are still on the path to EU.

The Euro-Atlantic future is impetus for economic growth: stimulus for investment, more trade, access to the EU single market, increased mobility of people, goods and capital, lower credit rates. It will help us create more jobs and prevent brain-drain, by keeping the youth at home.

Good neighborly relations and regional cooperation remain our common priority and strategic goal and we continue to work towards accomplishing our ambitions for EU integration.

We are committed to a vision of Balkans in 21st century, as a region of peace, stability and increased regional cooperation for economic benefit and prosperity of all citizens

Now it is time to unite over the fact that history is an important part of our identities, but the vision for a future, has a special place in our hearts.

Finally, I once again express my deep gratitude for the International Peace Prize of Westphalia.

This award is at the same time a recognition, but also an obligation for all our future political decisions to be committed to European values and peace that have no alternative.

Thank you!