

# February 15 – anniversary of the start of Bulgaria’s accession negotiations with the EU

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## On Monday Bulgaria marks the 10-th anniversary since the beginning of the negotiations for European Union membership.

The official opening of the negotiations process was on 15 February 2000, when the first sitting of the Inter-governmental Accession Conference took place in Brussels. In fact, on this day, the European Union formally opened the membership procedure for six countries – apart from Bulgaria and neighboring Romania, these were Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia and Malta. The decision to start these negotiations was taken at a EU summit in Helsinki on 10-11 December 1999 (*picture 1*).

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On the tenth anniversary of this symbolic day, Bulgaria remembers the key actors who attended this Brussels conference – former Portuguese Foreign Minister Jaime Gama (his country was then rotational EU President), former EU Commissioner of Enlargement Guenter Verheugen, as well as former Bulgarian Foreign Minister Nadejda Mihaylova – today an EPP MEP. As Council chair, Mr. Gama opened the Inter-governmental Conference by presenting the common EU position, then Commissioner Verheugen made a welcome address and Minister Mihaylova presented the Bulgarian position on the negotiations. This event marked the beginning of an intensive negotiation process, which continued for almost three years and a half. *Picture 2* shows a moment of Enlargement Commissioner Verheugen’s visit to Bulgaria on 29 November 1999, the accession talks being on top of the agenda of his formal visit.

Less than a month before the Brussels conference, on 20 January 2000, the Government in Sofia nominated for the first time a key negotiator, a negotiation team, as well as working groups in charge of the different chapters. The first Bulgarian key negotiator with the EU was Mr. Alexander Bojkov (December 1999 – June 2000), followed by Vladimir Kissiov (June 2000 – July 2001).

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At the end of this same year, on 20 January 2000, the EU Justice and Home Affairs Ministers Council took the historic decision of taking Bulgaria off the negative visa Schengen list (*picture 3*).

On 15 June 2004 Bulgaria concluded the EU accession negotiations by closing all of the 31 chapters – six months ahead of the schedule.

The archive video shows an extract of the 20 h. evening news of the Bulgarian Public TV, featuring an interview with former EU Commission President Romano Prodi, who is commenting the Union’s decision to start the enlargement negotiations with the six candidate-countries. “My message to the Bulgarian citizens is that these negotiations mark the beginning of a new, very positive era in the European Union’s development. Our objective is to help Bulgaria and the other countries in the region to return in the European family. I can see Bulgaria’s strong desire to become a EU member-state. This is an important sign for all the South-Eastern European region – so that it could be fully reconstructed and not stay in isolation anymore”, Prodi says.

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In a short interview for Europe Gateway on the occasion of this anniversary, one of Bulgaria’s first key negotiators, Mr. Vladimir Kissiov (*picture 4*), comments that it is important for today’s diplomats and experts, responsible for Bulgaria’s relations with the EU, to work in the same spirit of commitment and enthusiasm as “the pioneers, as we did it 10 years ago”; “It’s true, today Bulgaria is facing serious problems, but, being already a Member State, they can be solved much easier, Kissiov added. In his words, Bulgaria is in the right way and it is irreversible.

## More info:

[Some of the 2000 Inter-governmental conference’s original documents \(in English, pdf files\)](#)

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[Interview with Vladimir Kissiov \(in Bulgarian\)](#)  
[Bulgaria’s EU Accession Treaty \(English\)](#).