

# ALTHOUGH EU MEMBERSHIP IS A LOT ABOUT MONEY, IT IS MORE ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES - INTERVIEW WITH MALINKA JORDANOVA

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*Interview with Mrs. Malinka Ristevska Jordanova, Chief of Cabinet for the Deputy Prime Minister of Macedonia [Radmila Sekerinska](#), heading the [European integration](#), [Government of the Republic of Macedonia](#)*

**Mrs. Jordanova, what efforts does the Macedonian government take with respect to the visa regime?**

The technical explorative talks on the visa facilitation already took place. As you know, the European Commission has launched an initiative for visa facilitation with the countries in the region; the first country to negotiate with is Macedonia. Of course we have put forward our demands that are based on the Thessalonica agenda for visa liberalization. We are well aware that our citizens have very restrictive freedom of movement and their basic interest is visa liberalization. There are practically two tracks we want to discuss – one is visa liberalization, the other is visa facilitation. An aggravating factor is also the raising of the visa fee. It is to be discussed again in the Council of Justice and Home Affairs and this concerns the price of the Shengen visas in general.

Of course, we are working on our homework- border police and integrated border management have been established; new biometric passports introduced, fight against illegal immigration and trans-border crime intensified, etc.

**After the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, the EU enlargement process will be at a standstill. How is this perceived by the Macedonian public opinion?**

Of course there is a wide reaction to such statements. The public in Macedonia is highly interested in this issue. However the question of the absorption capacity, which has recently been revived, is not a new one. It has always been at the agenda – at every enlargement, even at the first, the second and the third. It is not the last enlargement that provokes this debate only. Since the Big Bang enlargement, this issue has really been emphasized. What we are trying to do is not to be distracted by raising fears, to work on our own agenda, our homework, to do the best we can, and – at the same time – to work with the member states on enabling future enlargement. They do have internal problems in explaining why the Union should expand further; they do have issues to tackle... However we have to be realistic and present our arguments. Macedonia is definitely not the country that is going to jeopardize the capacity of

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the Union with its 2 million people population.

This is why it would be realistic to expect that the process will continue, without a standstill.

### **Why do Macedonians want to join the European Union?**

I think that there is a very easy answer to that question. You as our neighbor can understand it very well. The reason is that we belong to Europe. This sharing of common values is something very sound. On the other side, we are a small country that has a very high interest in being connected, not disconnected and not isolated. Our future is in openness and we want to see an open united Europe. Black holes will definitely not be a mark of a united Europe.

### **The Macedonian EU-information campaign has a very interesting slogan, [The Sun, Too, Is A Star](#). It is very impressive for us, your neighbors. It shows a lot of self-confidence in the positive sense. How did you think of this slogan and what is its main objective?**

As many good things, it came out after a public competition. More than 3 years ago we launched this public competition for choosing the logo. We received many proposals. Three groups of authors came to the same proposal. The jury liked *The Sun, Too, Is A Star*, and the broader public perceives it as a real symbol. It really has a good spirit – on the one hand, it associates with the sun, our national symbol, on the other – the sun is also a global symbol. Then it opens a wide range of associations – identification, positivism... It has given specific brightness to the whole campaign and to the whole accession process that has intensified so much during the last years. We were lucky to get such good proposals by the participants in the public competition.

### **You mentioned the neighborhood. Is Bulgaria and Romania's expected accession perceived in your country as a step that will facilitate your European future?**

Definitely we see the advancement of Romania and Bulgaria as a positive sign. The earlier and the more prepared they get into the Union, the better for the next to follow. Cooperation is essential. We are trying to advance it; we found great partners in many European institutions and NGO's – people willing to share with us all they have learned and all that they know.

### **Whose example are you following most closely?**

In this positive spirit is the cooperation with the new member states, especially those that are neighboring, that have had the same context. For example, we have excellent cooperation with Slovenia – a lot of partnership, technical assistance, advice, and friendly relations. Also with Bulgaria, there are experts coming and going regularly for very useful dialogues.

### **Is the fight against corruption an easy thing in Macedonia?**

No, it is not easy. It has been quite an effort, there have also been results, but as you also know – the Commission is pushing for more effectiveness. The fight against corruption demands, political will, efforts from the administration, but also from the people in general, the citizens, in order to change things. We talk about things that should not be tolerated, about changing a pattern of behavior. In terms of legislation and institutions we have done well, making the mechanisms operational and effective is now in the focus.

### **Recently our Prime Minister said in a TV-statement that the 16-year long transition period was so painful that now the EU membership is a sort of compensation, even financial, for all the hardship the Bulgarians have survived so far. Do you agree with such a vision about the EU membership?**

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No. Although it is a lot about money, it is, I think, more about opportunities – future and present opportunities. What we need is to have the opportunities, ultimately, to have equal chances with the others and to have the capacity to grab those chances. It is not easy to get money from the European Commission, even when you are a member state. The competition does not stop when you become a member. The competition is tougher, for example for the money from the cohesion funds.

**Sometimes you will hear Bulgarians say, it's good to become a member state because the Europeans will come and solve our problems. Is the public feeling in neighboring Macedonia the same?**

Interesting question! It has been asked in many of the sociological surveys here. A lot of people think that "europeanisation" can be a stimulus for tackling problems, but it is not their ultimate solution. I think that the people in Macedonia are quite realistic and they know, that the only ones, who can solve these problems, are themselves.

**Mrs. Jordanova, the Macedonian government signed recently an agreement with CNN Television for advertisement of your country. What is the aim of this advertisement?**

The aim is to try to make Macedonia more visible, to change the image. It is a part of a general campaign presenting Macedonia globally. The government has decided to go for it as we have come to the conclusion that we need it now, we need to achieve a significant shift in our image as a country.

**A question about the EU-information campaign in the country. What is the main message that you wish to convey to the people of Macedonia with it?**

The aim now is not the general message – that we can do it, that we belong to Europe, or the common values. Somehow that stage is already absorbed by the public opinion in our country. We are now presenting a more targeted campaign – tailored according to the need of municipalities, border regions, etc. One of the most important topics is the pre-accession assistance, preparing projects, border cooperation. This campaign goes more into concrete detail than the previous one, which was more generally about the future of Macedonia into the EU. We are now trying to give more information in order to get more feedback from the public and from specific target groups.

**What should the public within the EU know about Macedonia and is it necessary to use foreign lobbyists to convey certain messages?**

We have been considering this like many other countries. This is an option. However nothing can replace the real bilateral and multilateral partnership of member – states with new member states, and, of course, all other entities. We can make a campaign, we can use lobbyists, but the member states have to deal with their internal expectations. This seems to be at stake right now. We cannot make a communication campaign for enlargement in all the member states. This is something that has to be dealt, I would say, in a deeper way.

**Portal Europe.bg thanks you very much for this interview.**

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