



Speech by the President of the European Council, Mr Donald Tusk

Sofia, 11 January 2017

Dear friends,

Distinguished guests,

Dear President of the Republic,

Dear President of the National Assembly,

Dear Prime Minister,

Dear Members of the Government,

Your Excellencies,

My beloved Fatherland, how beautiful you are!

How blue your vast skies are!

How your sights magically change!

Each glance reveals ever newer beauty.

These words of Ivan Vazov, the patron of this place, capture the spirit of today's celebration well.

"Each glance reveals ever newer beauty" – this reflection is present with me today, as President of the European Council and a Pole. Because as a Pole I understand well how much work, courage and determination it cost you, Bulgarians, to achieve European success for your fatherland. No one gave you anything for free. It was you, in the first place, who were the authors of this historic breakthrough, this "ever newer beauty".



For the younger generations, the theatre in which we find ourselves, is probably more closely associated with the renowned actor, Zachary Baharov, and his role in the cult series "Game of Thrones", than with the poetry of Vazov. The history of the Balkans is more dramatic and interesting than the screenplay of "Game of Thrones", even if there are no dragons in it. We would all like it if the present and future of the Balkans were less like dramatic screenplays. Stability, security, prosperity – this is what the people of the whole region deserve. And the EU's purpose is to help make this screenplay a reality.

It is a good thing that one of the priorities of the Bulgarian presidency is the future of the Western Balkans. Who, if not you – the descendants of Spartacus, the inheritors of the oldest European statehood, you, who never ever lost a flag in any battle – would be better placed to rise to this important and exceptionally difficult task, that is to renew the European perspective for the whole of the region. You have always been determined and brave, which you have also confirmed in recent years, and this is why I believe that during the presidency you will be just as efficient as Hristo Stoichkov was at the World Cup a quarter of a century ago. With a Prime Minister, who could strike fear into many a Thracian warrior, you will certainly make it.

Thank you.