



## Speech by Rumen Radev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria, at the Opening ceremony of the Bulgarian Presidency

Mr. President of the European Parliament,

Mr. President of the European Council,

Mr. President of the European Commission,

Mrs. President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria,

Mr. Prime-Minister,

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Starting from 1 January, we took on the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. We have been a member of the Union for 11 years, but for 13 centuries Bulgaria has been the southeastern gate of the continent. This is a historic experience that has cost us dearly. We on the Balkans know that tragedies stem from division. Europe is too big to be monolithic and yet too small to be divided. This is why the motto of our Presidency is United We Stand Strong.

Bulgaria has a model, proven over time, of good cohabitation of numerous religions. We are the motherland of Cyrillic, which is a bridge to the East. Bulgaria, today catching up the developed states in the Union, once saved its Jews from the darkest years on the continent. This makes me believe that we have contributed greatly and that we can contribute greatly to our European family.

We are taking on the Presidency at a difficult time for the Union. Global insecurity makes European defence imperative. Migration and terrorism require an active dialogue with the Union's big neighbours. Competitiveness should not be achieved by cutting social rights, but by



thoughtful investment in education and sophisticated technology. I am certain of one thing – when problems concern us all, the key is in realism and shared efforts. In order for Europe to continue to exist, we need understandable discourse, simplified procedures, a new confidence and the overcoming of egoism.

I believe that, in the coming six months all of you, our guests from Europe, will feel at home among the Roman ruins and Orthodox churches in Bulgaria. Especially in Sofia where an Orthodox church, a Catholic cathedral, a Mosque and a Synagogue coexist just a couple of hundred meters away from one-another. This is a historic asset, which will remind us all that Europe is not only an economic space, but a territory of freedom, deeply rooted in history, culture and humanity, on which we should not turn our backs.

Welcome!