

15th Jubilee Vienna Economic Forum

- I am convinced that from our **common efforts** depends **what Europe we will have tomorrow**, because **building a stronger Europe stretches far beyond the political strategies and actions of the policy-makers and business leaders alone.**

- Therefore, I believe **the right formula for ensuring growth and development** to bring **tangible results for the region and its citizens** is:

- facilitating **a direct exchange between the political leaders and high-level representatives of regional and international economy,**
- establishing **a more pragmatic oriented and intense regional economic cooperation**
- and – with support from the regional leaders – **looking for solutions in different sectors of the regional economy.**

- I have to say that our region on the Balkans is **a region with high potential**, regional economies are fast growing. Thus **deepening the relations between EU and WB countries is of a mutual interest.**

- However, **further efforts are needed to increase the competitiveness of our economies**, to address high unemployment, especially among the young, to increase prosperity and to create business opportunities not least for local players.
- **World, Europe and the region are changing rapidly as many challenges, which are testing Europe's fundamental values, must be addressed** in a substantive manner – the impact of **Fourth Industrial Revolution, climate change, inequality, aging, migration, terrorism**.
- **New players** are becoming more and more important in the (new) **world economy**.
- In turn, it will be **very hard for the countries in the region one by one to position themselves as leading players** no matter their competitive advantages.
- That is why **regional cooperation is of particular importance**. **Promoting the Balkans and our potential for investments as a region**, as well **finding ways to fund integrated projects**, must be **the pillars of the effective regional policy**.

- In this regard, increasing **connectivity is a central issue**, which was in the focus of the Sofia Summit, as well as other formats like the Berlin process.
- For sure, **building bridges for a common European future is not an easy task**. Apart from the **obvious and resource-demanding task for setting out the infrastructural networks** of transport, energy and digital connectivity, **this concerns also people-to-people and business-to-business contacts**.
- **That is why we (EU2018BG) insisted to have the Sofia Priority Agenda with specific projects as a concrete result of the EU-WB Summit**.
 - **Extending the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T)**
 - Today, the whole of the EU is embracing **digital transformation**. In order to provide a better life to all citizens we need to ensure greater availability of digital infrastructure, enable better regulatory framework and level playing field.
 - And here **regional cooperation must be leading – ICT hub**.
 - Here I would like to point that **using all opportunities for establishing platforms for regional cooperation** in the region and **involving in the dialogue all stakeholders is crucial**.

- **A little bit „more regional thinking”** maybe is the key to success. We all know that requires a lot of efforts.

- **Regional Economic area,**

- **four-party summit between Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Serbia,**

- **16+1 Initiative**

- We would create a think tank **Global Partnership Centre** in Bulgaria in cooperation with China – **boost mutually beneficial cooperation and investments.**

- I would like to add that a little bit more **„border thinking”** is also essential **for the region - INTERREG programmes.**