Thessaloniki, 15.9.2021

**STATEMENT**

**DPM Nikola Dimitrov**

Ευχαριστώ πολύ dear Miltiadis,, friends and colleagues,

It’s a great pleasure to be here in Thessaloniki, first of all it’s a really beautiful city, one of the two greatest in Greece, I hope that was a politically correct thing to say, and second, on the context of the debate today, this city holds an important symbolism for the whole Balkans when under the Greek leadership the Council made a promise to the people of the Balkans that their future lies in the European Union. This was done in 2003, 18 years ago. Today the trust that this will happen is somewhat shaken and we all have an important task to restore this credibility and enforce this promise that this is a realistic one, that progress will be made and this will happen.

For Greece I think and maybe other Member States but not for all, it is clear that this region is a part of Europe. Imagine a house and that house is the European Union and there is one room that is not plagued in water supply, in the electricity and the heating. The house will suffer not only that room. We are surrounded by member states, we share economic interests, we trade with Europe, we have European foreign direct investments, we share security concerns with the rest of Europe, we need to be part of that common European house.

To restore this trust that was made in Thessaloniki it will take leadership of the kind that the Greek government and Minister Varvitsiotis, the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union show today by inviting us together with the region to discuss the future of Europe and I have to underline and confirm what was already said, we really had very open and honest discussion. I am grateful to Greece and the Greek government for this leadership, for this support, I think it is telling that the country with whom we share a border and Greece shares a border with several candidate countries, shares this vision of common European future.

I always end everything that I publicly say in Greece with a Greek word. We had a bit of debate behind the closed doors and I have to go back to my previous visit when I used ‘τώρα είναι η ώρα’ [tora ine I ora] when it comes to, it’s really high time to start making progress of the European accession of the region. We have debated for a long time, we worked hard, we deserved it and the recognition of that progress will serve as an inspiration to many other and I think it would be a good step to restore the credibility of the Thessaloniki promise. We will make this together with Greece and the region.