

Closing Speech by Deputy Minister of the Interior (Sector of Macedonia and Thrace) Mr. Stavros Kalafatis at the BALKAN FORUM 2022

Dear colleagues, special guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I warmly thank you all for your participation at this cross-country Forum for the "Digital transformation, networking, collaborations and convergences in the Balkans".

You submitted your experiences.

You developed good practices and applications.

You provided useful information.

You shared ideas, thoughts and suggestions with us.

You provided an embossed image of the world, which changed acceleration. And you showed how necessary it is, to go faster and more massively in this world, both for the public, as well as for the private sector.

May tomorrow, nobody will live in digital poverty.

We agreed - I believe - that interoperability is an essential condition for the Digital Transformation acceleration of the European member states. Especially the Balkan countries, due to their mutually dependent economies, they have an extra reason to move hand in hand in this path. And we also want to share our know-how with our neighbors. So that the positive signal of Development will arise more powerful throughout our neighborhood.

We agree, I believe, that the organizational bodies could cooperate even better, on technological issues, on the use of specialized digital tools, on interoperability, on the education and training of human resources. We agree that it is the role of local governmental bodies that is important. And it is considered to be a special and positive fact, that the Local Government took over a leading role, to turn into "smart cities" the urban centers. And of course, there exists a quite large prospectus of improvement for the Balkan cities to become more durable and smarter.

We agreed, I believe, that the organizational bodies, the local governmental bodies and central governmental administration, they all can and should take advantage of the experience on this scientific field. After all, it's a fact that the scientific community is a key pillar, a basic

determinant, not only for the dissemination but also for the creation of new knowledge on the path of the Digital Transformation. The scientific bodies, the educational staff and young people who are the experts of the future, can help us. Research and innovation have vital importance to the digital transition of the Balkan countries.

We agree that the innovations that are already taking place, reshape the overall model of production and highlight new opportunities that arise internationally. The challenge, to plan towards this direction, is considered to induce strategic importance for every country, for the broader region, for the Southeastern Europe.

We agreed that on the way to tomorrow, the role of small and medium-sized enterprises and industrial sectors is extremely important. We can, it is within our capabilities, to incorporate the technologies of digital transformation (IT clouding, AI, IoT) on business to run faster.

We agree that we still need a lot and that we can do more. Let's reconsider the use of the Digital Services. Let's take into account people with disabilities. Let's calculate relevant applications so that they can be used easily by people with low digital skills. Let's offer, as much as possible, more integrated digital services.

We know that cross-border cooperation is a key-driver for regional development. We know that there exists a framework and also exist the funding possibilities from the EU, for the implementation of these collaborations.

The good examples as mentioned in the forum, can and they should be a starting point towards that direction.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The challenges we experience justify our choice to reposition Thessaloniki, the Macedonia and the Thrace on the map of tomorrow.

We lounge more openness to the future world. We plan and promote over 30 projects for the Thessaloniki by 2030. The Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, assures that we have to do much more for our neighborhood. What we seek for ourselves, we seek it for our neighbors too. We aspire and are optimistic for our Balkan neighborhood. Because this is our neighborhood.

We thank everyone who participated in the 4th Balkan Forum. The way is now open for the 5th event. The proposed subject is "Sustainable tourism

challenges and opportunities in the Balkans", is a topic -a challenge, but also an invitation as well. In order to find common grounds. New fields of cooperation. New synergies.

The Sector of Macedonia and Thrace Sector, internally, efforts to implement these synergies. It already implements them, for example the opening crossing border of Laimos, which will give the possibility for tourists across Europe to quickly and easily visit regions in two Balkan countries. So we have to spot new collaborations. This is what Greece is seeking in the Balkans.

Good neighborhood relations with everyone.

Let's reach out help to each other. In order to create our common future.

Thank you very much