



Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Seventh EU progress report towards accession: what has changed

In October 2012, the European Commission reiterated its recommendation on the launch of accession negotiations with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). However, the absence of progress on the name dispute with Greece is still hampering the country's progress towards joining the EU.

The report at a glance

For the fourth consecutive time, the Commission concluded in its 2012 [report](#) that FYROM was ready to start talks for European Union (EU) accession. The country continues to "sufficiently meet" the political criteria, to be "well advanced" with the economic criteria, and has made "further progress" in taking on the obligations of EU membership. The report noted the adoption of proposals for the improvement of the legislative framework for elections and, in the area of freedom of expression, for the decriminalisation of defamation. There has been some progress in the fight against organised crime, notably through the issuance of over 100 international arrest warrants. However, in the area of anti-corruption policy, capacity has been strengthened only "slightly" and there has been "little visible progress" in terms of end-results.

What has not changed

Relations between the FYROM and Greece are still affected by the name issue. The two countries remained engaged in talks under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) in search of a solution. In October 2012, Greece presented a [Memorandum of understanding](#) on the matter. EU diplomats [expressed](#) disappointment at its absence of new proposals, while FYROM press [called](#) it a "Trojan Horse". In [response](#), FYROM's Foreign Minister Poposki underlined the need for "full commitment by both sides".

Reactions within FYROM

Then Minister of European Affairs Pesevski [praised](#) the progress report as "the most positive ever". Foreign Minister Poposki [welcomed](#) the return of the adjective "Macedonian", describ-

ing it as a "correction of a mistake that occurred as a result of unprincipled pressures on the [Commission]". In contrast, citizens of Greece's Macedonia region [saw](#) the use of the adjective as an "assault on [their] cultural identity".

Media [analysts](#) highlighted that ethnic-Macedonian and ethnic-Albanian Government representatives had different interpretations of the progress report. The former focused mainly on the positive remarks, while the latter put a moderate emphasis on the negative findings.

Recent developments

In December 2012, [EU ministers for European Affairs](#) were unable to agree on the opening of negotiations, calling instead on the Commission to present another progress report. [Press sources](#) claimed at least two countries blocked the decision. Greece insisted on settling the name issue before opening accession talks. Bulgaria, which had previously supported the opening of negotiations, also wielded a veto linked to [alleged](#) dissemination of anti-Bulgarian stereotypes and territorial claims.

On 24 December 2012, a [political crisis](#) erupted in FYROM. After repeated [calls](#) from the EU and other international bodies, an [agreement](#) was reached on 1 March 2013 with [EU mediation](#).

On 16 April 2013, the Commission issued a new [progress report](#) responding to the Council request. Overall, the implementation of EU-related reforms has continued, with progress on almost all the targets and indicators. Relations with neighbours remained good, and steps have been taken in bilateral relations with Bulgaria and Greece. Formal talks on the 'name issue' also gained momentum. The report also stressed the importance of the implementation of the political agreement of 1 March 2013.

European Parliament reactions

In a [vote](#) on a resolution on FYROM's [2012 progress report](#), drafted by Richard Howitt (S&D, UK), the Foreign Affairs Committee urged the Council to set a date for the start of negotiations before the end of June 2013.