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.

Author: Ivana Katsarova
Contact: ivana.katsarova@ep.europa.eu

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