

## Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: impasse?

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia obtained EU candidate status in December 2005. Every year since 2009, the Commission's progress reports have recommended starting accession talks. The European Council has yet to follow these recommendations and approve the launch of negotiations. With the name issue unresolved there is little prospect of a change in the Council.

### State of play

According to the latest, predominantly critical, [progress report](#) on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, published in October 2014, EU accession talks are at an impasse. For the sixth consecutive year the Commission reiterated its recommendation to start accession talks. Nevertheless, the 2014 report includes an [implicit threat](#) that this recommendation could be withdrawn if current political trends persist. In December 2014, the Council again [did not follow](#) the Commission's recommendation, which came as [little surprise](#) to Macedonian politicians. This has led to a decline in interest in continuing the required reforms, with a resultant reduction of the EU's influence in the country.

### Progress in 2014?

The report has provided another reason for a [dispute](#) between the parties in power and opposition. Some of the expressions used – for instance 'evident backsliding' and 'backward steps' – have led Macedonian politicians to refer to it rather as a report on '[backlogging](#)', sending a message that 'Macedonia is headed on a dangerous road'. Politicisation of state institutions, the hindered functioning of the parliament, selective justice and government control over media are among the EU's top concerns. In terms of media freedom, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia scored [worst](#) across the Western Balkans in 2014, ranking 117th out of 180 countries on the [World Press Freedom Index](#).

### The name dispute and good neighbourly relations

Although not the sole reason for blocking entry, in 2014 [the name dispute with Greece](#) remained the main obstacle to EU membership. It threatens to freeze the EU accession prospects of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and causes further disappointment in the country. Reaching a mutually acceptable solution to the name dispute under the [guidance](#) of the United Nations is seen as crucial, along with maintaining good relations with neighbouring countries. Some progress has been achieved on the latter, namely towards the conclusion of an [agreement with Bulgaria](#) on good neighbourly relations. In 2012, [Bulgaria had also vetoed](#) accession talks with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the Council.

### Political crisis

The [presidential and early parliamentary elections in 2014](#) have drawn the country into another political crisis. The opposition did not recognise the election results, claiming electoral fraud. The current political situation is one of renewed inter-ethnic tensions, a dysfunctional parliament and [lack of constructive dialogue](#). During his visit in Skopje in February 2015, Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, said the situation was a [serious concern](#) for the EU.

On 24 February 2015, a [motion for a resolution](#) on the 2014 Progress Report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, drafted by Ivo Vajgl (ALDE, Slovenia) [passed](#) the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee by 47 votes to 10, with no abstentions. The resolution will be voted at the March plenary. It highlights a number of problematic areas, such as the judiciary, media freedom, politicisation of the government at central and local level, and the lack of dialogue. It notably stresses that the name dispute must be solved before the end of accession talks but should not be an obstacle to their starting, as the protracted gridlock on the name issue risks undermining the credibility of the EU's enlargement policy. It therefore '[...]calls for more active EU engagement and invites the new HR/VP to develop new initiatives to overcome the current stalemate.'