

## FYR Macedonia: 2016 report

In April 2017, the European Parliament is due to debate a resolution on the European Commission's 2016 enlargement report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The report acknowledges that during a politically turbulent 2016, the country failed to progress in key EU-related reform areas and even backtracked in some. Following the December 2016 elections, political uncertainty remains and the EU is urging prompt formation of a new government, a process currently blocked.

### Background

FYR Macedonia has been a candidate for EU membership since 2005. The European Commission first recommended the start of accession talks with the country in 2009. In 2015, its recommendation was tied to implementing the [Pržino agreement](#) and the '[urgent reform priorities](#)' (on systemic institutional failings).

### European Commission 2016 report

The [report](#) takes stock of the [political situation](#), noting the persistent climate of polarisation, which puts a brake on much needed EU-related reforms. It underlines [constant challenges](#) to democracy and rule of law due to state capture, affecting the functioning of democratic institutions and key areas of society. In 2016, the political will to implement the 2015 Pržino agreement and the 'urgent reform priorities' was considered largely missing. FYR Macedonia was long seen as amongst the most advanced in alignment with the EU *acquis*, however in 2016, progress in key areas stalled or reversed. Backsliding was noted in the functioning of the judiciary. No progress was achieved in fighting corruption and organised crime, where political meddling in the relevant bodies' work has led to a slowdown in prevention and repression activities. Freedom of expression and the media's situation remain a serious challenge. Public administration reform has progressed slightly, yet failure to deliver on necessary reforms in public financial management led to a significant [cut in EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance \(IPA\) funds](#) in 2016. The inter-ethnic situation remained fragile, and the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement still needs to be reviewed. The report commends the increased involvement of civil society in the public sphere, but highlights the unfavourable conditions for its functioning. It notes the good level of preparedness in developing a market economy, yet admits no progress was seen in 2016, and expresses concern over the large informal economy. The country is also commended for its approach to the migration crisis, and for cooperating with Greece in bilateral [confidence building measures](#).

#### 'Fundamentals' state of play, EPRS, 2017.

	Progress	Level of preparation
Judiciary	backsliding	some
Corruption	none	some
Organised crime	none	some
Freedom of expression	none	some
PAR	some	moderate
Economic criteria	none	good

Derived from [European Commission](#), 2016.

### European Parliament position

In February 2017, the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) adopted a [motion for a resolution](#) on the 2016 report. It welcomes the credible elections held in December 2016, and urges the political parties to swiftly form a new government, ready to work on reforms. AFET confirms its support for opening accession talks, should the Pržino Agreement and the urgent reform priorities be properly implemented. It expresses concern about pervasive political interference undermining reforms in multiple areas: the judiciary, the public administration, the media, and in combating corruption. The Committee calls in particular for the autonomy of the Special Prosecutor's work to be ensured, and for civil society's role in policymaking to be stepped up. It commends the country's constructive role in tackling the migration crisis, in regional cooperation, and its increased alignment with EU foreign policy stances. The Committee encourages finalising a bilateral agreement on good neighbourly relations with [Bulgaria](#), and resolving the name issue with Greece.

Own-initiative report: [2016/2310 \(INI\)](#); Committee responsible: AFET; Rapporteur: Ivo Vajgl, ALDE, Slovenia.

