

**EUROPEAN UNION-FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA
JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE**

**10th Meeting
7th June 2012, Brussels**

MINUTES

First working session

Opening of the meeting:

Mr Kenan HASIPI and Mr Jorgo CHATZIMARKAKIS, *Co-Chairmen of the Joint Parliamentary Committee* opened the meeting at 09:15 and welcomed the participants.

J. CHATZIMARKAKIS insisted the European Parliament has been and will continue to be a strong supporter of the EU Enlargement policy. The European Parliament desires the political reunification of the continent and stressed the importance of supporting the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Noted the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been an EU candidate country for over 6 years, and has had a positive assessment both from the Commission and EP for over 4 years. Furthermore, he noted that the EP resolution of 14th March had reiterated the EP share the assessment of the Commission in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's continuous fulfilment of the political criteria for accession. The EP therefore regretted the Council's decision not to open accession negotiations at its meeting on 9th September 2011 despite the Commission's recommendation for the third consecutive year. He mentioned that the question of when to start accession talks will be at the heart of the debate at the JPC and is a central point of interest between the two parties. He noted the issues that were raised in the last meeting in Skopje and Brussels have been dealt with to some extent and that the EP welcomes the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's participation at the High Level Accession Dialogue on Freedom of Expression in the media; Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights, Public Administration Reform, Electoral Reform, and strengthening of the Market Economy.

K. HASIPI stated that the main aim of the delegation from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is to obtain the date for pre-accession negotiation talks. He notes they have been granted a positive progress report by the Commission for three consecutive years, and this is something they expect this year too. Hasipi suggests they have practically opened two chapters, numbers 23 and 24 with many issues relating to the JPC agenda and they have built a roadmap with tasks that they are convinced they will deliver. In addition, he notes that during Mr Füle's visit in September, they will be in a more comfortable position with most of the tasks completed. He states that although the High Level Accession Dialogues are by no means a substitute for accession talks, it will no doubt act as a bridge towards an opening of negotiations.

He noted they should obtain the date of pre-accession negotiation talks this year and that this should be their primary concern during the JPC. He mentioned other matters

that were discussed, namely the harmonisation of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's position with regard to the ICJ ruling, and the use of the adjective "Macedonian." He stated they believe the issue with regards to the use of the adjective is a closed and solved matter as it was included in Mr Howitt's report. Furthermore, Hasipi stated that the EP has also clearly expressed its view with regards to this matter, and if the two manage to harmonise their positions, the report will be a solid ground for the Rapporteur of the Republic of Macedonia and the final progress report of the European Commission and the accession process of the Republic of Macedonia.

1. Adoption of the draft agenda

The draft agenda was adopted with a changed order of some items in the afternoon session (as noted in these minutes).

2. Approval of the minutes of the 9th meeting of the EU- Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee held on 3-4 November 2011 in Skopje

The minutes of the 9th meeting were approved.

3. Exchange of views with representatives of the government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, of the Council of the European Union and of the European Commission on the relations between the European Union and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;

- **Mr Nikola Poposki, Minister for Foreign affairs, Government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;**
- **Mr Fernando Gentilini, EEAS, Director for Western Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey, representing of the Council of the European Union;**
- **Ms Alexandra Cas-Granje, Director, European Commission, DG Enlargement, Directorate B (Croatia, Montenegro, The former Yugoslav Republic Of Macedonia, Turkey, Iceland);**

Nikola POPOSKI noted that this is the 10th meeting of the JPC of the EP & the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and in the last 15 years the dialogue between the EU & Macedonia has taken place at various levels. He mentions the EP managed to transform itself into a very vocal supporter of Macedonia and EU integration and the fact that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been hearing urges and appeals of opening pre accession negotiation talks is another strong signal of the importance the EP attaches to the EU integration of Macedonia. He notes the name issue with Greece has hindered their path towards the EU but that they can build a constructive atmosphere taking into account all of the orientations and recommendations that the EU has so far been giving in its consecutive reports. He noted it will be important for them to begin the process of negotiations during the June European Council meeting; which will take place shortly.

He noted that the ICJ ruling will be important, and that they hope to overcome all bilateral issues; they welcomed the finalisation of accession talks for Croatia, which

created a positive climate and has shown that they are able to overcome bilateral issues that burdened both Slovenia and Croatia; that this should be taken as a positive and constructive example of the active contribution for the integration of a country.

He mentioned that during the JPC, there was also a parallel meeting in Athens, Greece of representatives of governments of Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia which should contribute to the rapid integration of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to the European family. He mentioned he believes the spirit of cooperation will also be reflected in the decisions by the Greek government for the opening of possible negotiations by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Media freedom & professional standards

Poposki noted that the most exposed issue was the effort for decriminalisation of defamation; that they had held talks with stakeholders in line with the recommendations of stakeholders, and that a major step forward is that they are doing something that is practiced only in five Member States so far.

Judicial system

He stated that they are committed to the development of a reliable court system, with an efficient judiciary including a reduction in the number of accumulated and unresolved cases. He mentioned that there will also be an amendment in the legislation with regard to special investigative measures to reduce the role of the minister of internal affairs.

Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA)

He stated that these measures are an important step and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has proven it has the capacity to implement the measures foreseen in this agreement; that the European and Euro-Atlantic integration process has given it an exceptionally important dimension.

Reform of public administration

He stated that they are preparing a new law on administration which will be in consultation with the EC with a specific emphasis on the merit system in relation to recruitment and careers; that the reforms of the electoral system were also taking place in coordination with the OAC and that the aim was to finish this process in September 2013 by including all of the recommendations in time for the local elections.

Market economy

He stated that they are leading a very prudent policy on market economy in the last 10 years and they should obtain functional market economy status.

He mentioned that he hopes the efforts invested in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia will be reflected in the autumn EC progress report and also by the EP.

F. GENTILINI mentioned he agrees with everything that has been said on the high level accession dialogue; that the response from the top of the government was very encouraging and had the potential to produce significant results. He stated that it is their hope that the security question will continue to be dominated by a sense of responsibility in the country.

A. CAS-GRANJE who is representing Commissioner Füle, mentioned that Commission is very committed to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and that the Commissioner is an advocate of the high level accession dialogues. Granje noted the recent developments on the progress report and high level accession dialogue launched by Commissioner Füle and Prime Minister Gruevski which included:

She summarised that in 2011, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continued to fulfil the political criteria & the Commission called on them to intensify the pace of reforms. She noted that the objective of the high level accession dialogues are to intensify the pace of reform in selected areas and ensure the country gets closer to meeting the political and economic criteria's which include the freedom of expression, the rule of law, public administration reform, electoral reform, and economic criteria. She welcomed the publication of the roadmap which has concrete targets and measures and noted a second meeting of the High Level Accession Dialogue (HLAD) took place in Skopje on 7th May with Commissioner Füle and PM Gruevski. The early developments in each of the five areas include:

Freedom of expression & the media

Granje noted that freedom of expression is a fundamental value for them and great importance is attached to it. She mentioned there is much work underway in order to decriminalise defamation, with the establishment of a media working group and representatives from the journalists association which will work towards decriminalising defamation and ensuring it becomes a civil law instead. She also mentioned that with regards to the freedom of expression, dialogue must be intensified and necessary steps must be taken such as training the judiciary, judges and lawyers amongst others.

Rule of Law and fundamental rights

She stated that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia participated in the screening exercise with Montenegro in March and it was highly represented; that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has committed itself to combating anti corruption with quarterly reports to monitor their progress.

She highlighted that the OFA is a key document in maintaining democracy and the rule of law in the country, but recent tragic incidents confirmed the need to strengthen the relations between the different communities. She stated that they aim to put forward a comprehensive review of the OFA under the HLAD and review the states implementation of this agreement.

Public Administration

Granje mentioned that there is a continuous and productive dialogue in this area and the government has engaged with the commission through the regular special group on public administration reform. The results of this dialogue include (a) the preparation of a new law on general administration procedures; and (b) the approach should be extended to other areas e.g. decentralisation, merit based recruitment & employment of non majority members.

Electoral Reform

She noted that a steering committee had been formed in February 2012 and representatives of political parties were involved but further effort is needed to hasten

the work in this area as they would like a revision of the voters list & amendments to codes before the next elections in 2013 (local elections).

Economy

She stated that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia needs a functioning market economy criterion; that they have selected three areas under the first phase of the HLAD: which includes (a) Inclusive labour market; (b) Improved business environment in order to protect foreign investment and (c) a strengthened economic policy and links between policy and implementation to ensure consistency.

G. KOUMOUTSAKOS stated that the EU needs to deal with its own internal matters without ignoring that it is a family open to new members, based on rules and principles; that no member state would like to see the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia outside the EU, that the EU would like to see its integration and accession process to take place under such conditions where problems will not multiply but solutions will be provided. Therefore, respecting relations of good neighbourhood is of fundamental importance for the entire edifice of the EU.

He mentioned that in June, the Council of Europe will have to confirm that it is taking into account the decision of the ICJ, however, his was not done by NATO in Chicago, and the decision concerns NATO. He therefore stated this is 'the limit of fantasy to expect it to be the concern of the EU.' He mentioned that with regards to the name, if there was to be a solution, it would come from Greece for this would immediately liberate an entire strategy that Greece has developed for the area. He highlighted that they want to meet their neighbours halfway and solve these issues irrevocably so its entire EU journey will be strengthened but that they cannot accept the logic that Greece has not made any efforts at compromise-which would be a distortion of reality. He therefore noted that any amendments on this issue, oral or written, that has been submitted on this issue exceed the competence of this committee and should therefore not be voted for.

M. CRAMER mentioned his amendments and that he is aiming for a compromise. The amendments made include, "Iron curtain trail," a book on climate change, and noted the objectives to reach by 2020 include a 20% reduction in the use of renewable energy, reduction of emissions and 20% more efficiency. In relation to the name, Cramer insisted that it is not only a name but cultural identity.

A. KOVATCHEV insisted that there was a misunderstanding with regard to the proposed historical joint expert committee commission which did not relate to the promotion of minority and language rights. The main goal of this proposed committee was to educate youth on tolerance, put in fact based text books and to facilitate a fact based interpretation of history and to overcome historic tensions.

Short Break

4. Consideration and adoption of the Recommendations

The amendments tabled by members of the JPC were debated and voted.

As a result the text produced as a whole has been accepted by the Committee (attached).

Afternoon Session

5. Regional waste management and alternative energy sources: greater use of EU pre-accession funds;

K. HASIPI noted that this is a significant subject both for the EU and its policies with regard to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. He mentioned that the year 2007 saw the establishment of a system of integrated waste management; that he will focus on renewable energy and that there is a target of 20% reduction in the consumption of renewable energy. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia will be at EU standards if it achieves this. He encouraged investment in renewable energy as it is not only good for the environment but it will also help drive the economy.

M. CRAMER also highlighted the general EU circumstances suggests a need for renewable solar energy, wind energy and electricity motorways. He also mentioned that a European renewable energy union could be built up with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia fully involved.

K. HASIPI noted that in 2011, they opened a debate on the possible use of renewable energy resources, with guests from Bavaria, Germany, one of the federal units with the most investment in this area; although he noted that this may be an ambitious target for 2020.

6. Economic Situation in the country: strategies of the government for overcoming current challenges

S. BONEVA noted that in the past few years, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had invested a lot in order to improve the economic state & attract foreign investment as featured in the road map of the government. In relation to the functioning market economy and the degree of fulfilment of the necessary Copenhagen criteria, she stated that with regard to criteria one, they fully implemented this with regard to the existence of a wide consensus on the economic policies of the government, through a positive opinion of government institutions, Trade Unions, educational institutions and local government. She also noted the existence of an economic council in the government composed of representatives of several institutions.

In relation to the second Copenhagen criteria and macro economic stability, she mentioned that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has dealt with the global crisis better than other countries with reference to reports conducted by the World Bank, IMF, EBRD and the Vienna institute. In addition, inflation is controlled to a great extent, fluctuating between 2 and 3 % and there is a low budget deficit of 3%. Additionally, there is an economic growth of 3% compared to other countries in the Western Balkans.

The third Copenhagen criteria are also being fulfilled with a growth in import marked at 28.4%, export 32.5% and an increase is expected in 2012-2014.

In relation to the fourth Copenhagen criteria and market exit and entry, she noted that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has marked continuous success and progress as per the World Bank report, leading the south east Europe region.

The fifth Copenhagen criteria in relation to an adequate legal system and a developed financial sector are also being fulfilled, with over 99% of the territory registered in real estate. Additionally, the efficiency of the judicial system has improved, and there have been contributions to investment and the generation of new jobs.

She noted that the government will continue to attract foreign direct investment with 300 million Euros of investment last year alone, especially in the automotive, information, textiles, electronics and energy sectors in demand. These measures foresee a program for employment of 4000 by local self government. She also underlined projects that will create new jobs and establish self employment programs including credits and grants. She also mentioned an initiative to distribute state land to vulnerable people, a government program to provide 10.7 million Euros to finance SMEs and a general desire to do more to provide for socially vulnerable people and families.

J. CHATZIMARKAKIS welcomed developments made despite difficult geographic conditions, but noted the unemployment rate in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a serious problem, with figures showing 30% over average. He underlined concerns over youth unemployment, which is at 52%.

S. BONEVA agreed unemployment is a serious problem but after restructuring of economy to a market economy, there has been a gradual decrease in unemployment from 75,000. She underlined the decision to invest by two major international companies using their own money shows there is trust, a climate for investment and multiplication of capital. The only handicap is that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is not a member of NATO or the EU, and it should therefore be given a date for accession talks to begin so it can open the market for capital.

She noted that economic growth is between 2-3% and with this rate; it is unlikely that a significant move in the labour market can be made but there is hope to provide economic growth of 2% by the end of 2011.

7. Focus on developments in the country in the context of the High Level Accession Dialogue:

a. Fight against corruption and organised crime:

A. MILOSHOSKI stated that the rule of law, judicial reform and awareness amongst citizens is vital for the systematic reduction of corruption. He noted that in October 2011, a law was adopted on the finance of political parties, regulating their funds, and the distribution and activities of political parties during political pre electoral campaigns including donations, underlining that they are now obliged to have a register of donations. He noted that a national financial institution to monitor (state audit institute) some political parties during the pre electoral period, created obligations to certain media and private persons. He insisted that the implementation of this law will ensure they are more efficient in the fight against corruption. He noted that the state commission on the prevention of corruption became the single

administrative body in charge of implementing this issue. He stated that starting in 2012, they adopted an anti corruption campaign in the ministry of interior in order to reduce the illegal acts of certain officials within institutions such as the police force. In addition, the international perception towards the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the fight against corruption has also become favourable which is highlighted in the transparency index poll of 2006, which saw the country in 106th place, while in 2011, it went down to 60th place. He concluded that an open media and criticisms by the opposition political parties provide for stimulus to reform.

E. BAUER suggested Macedonians faced several problems on their way to begin accession negotiations to join the EU. These include the name issue, human rights, freedom of the media and judiciary reform issues. She insisted that the fight against corruption and organised crime remains a key challenge and priority for many countries including the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. This phenomenon has a serious negative impact on business and investment and damages the overall view and opinion of the country.

She noted that the UN report on drugs and crime in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 2011 and its findings were surprising. According to this report, after unemployment and poverty, corruption is considered the 3rd most important problem in the country; 13% respondents stated that in the last 12 months, prior to the survey, 1 in 10 had been exposed to corruption either directly or through household members. She continued stating that according to a Skopje based NGO; Macedonians pay around 1 billion Euros in bribes, which is almost half of the national revenue in 2011. It was found that 32% of citizens initiated the payment to speed up a procedure, finalise a procedure or receive a better treatment and almost 60% of bribes were paid to doctors, and more than 30 to police officers which is extremely dangerous.

K. HASIPI insisted that although the information Bauer provided is reliable, there is an incompatibility between the findings of transparency international and a high percentage of corruption. He reiterated Miloshoski's statement, arguing that the fight against crime and corruption is a continuous process, and that the transition period contributed to corruption.

b. Intercommunity relations and review of the implementations of the Ohrid Framework Agreement

A. Ljabishta noted that Albanians are the second largest ethnic group in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia followed by the Turkish and Serbs. He emphasised that the country's constitution discriminated against the minorities; they were not involved in the decision making process, language and culture. They were routinely ignored, and their participation in public administration was non existent, and it is for this reason that inter-ethnic relations were bad. Following the crisis in 2001, they adopted the OFA which defined the basis for building a new country with a multi ethnic democracy. OFA was used as a basis to bring about concrete changes to the constitution, to parliamentary procedure, and a division of power carried out to ensure all minorities were effectively represented. He noted that the implementation of the OFA helped to strengthen peace in the country, and it is therefore a key priority for the state and an essential pillar for democracy and the rule of law in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. He noted that these provisions are, unfortunately,

not respected in all institutions. While there is legislation on the use of Albanian in parliamentary sessions as a working language, these are not always applied in public life. A plan has therefore been adopted to enforce the application of the OFA. He stated that the key priority is to strengthen inter ethnic relations.

J. CHATZIMARKAKIS suggested that teachers must be trained along with a revision of textbooks. He noted that the EU can provide assistance as the EU works with Turkey, perhaps EU could send Turkish teachers as exchange programs.

c. Freedom of media and the recent dialogue between the government and media representatives:

A. PETROV noted that media and media freedom is of exceptional importance due to the role they play in modern democracies. The roadmap between the EU and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia includes the media and media ownership amongst others. He noted there should be sanctions for public institutions, and responsibility lies with state institutions as well as journalists which will make for pluralism within the media. He insisted that there should be full observance of Article 11 on the law on media; which states that co-founders cannot be state institutions, political parties, public enterprises, local self government units, public officials or members of their families. Petrov noted that the owners of the two major private TV channels are apart of the ruling coalition and are members of the parliament. He insisted that it is a major step forward to ensure the respect of this article, by all, with more transparency in government.

In addition, he noted that budget funds that are the citizens' money are being spent on the promotion of a state institution. He insisted that budget funds ought to be spent in a planned way and in the public interest in a fair, objective and transparent manner.

He proposed the adoption of a strategy for media development which is compatible with the positions of the EC and the commitments that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia took with the government.

J. CHATZIMARKAKIS insisted that the proportion and property rights of the media are not just a problem in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia but a problem faced everywhere. Therefore, openness and transparency is needed.

d. Reform in the field of judiciary and public administration

K. HASIPI stated that in light of the recommendations made by the 2011 progress report by the EC and the priorities for accession partnership, the state has continuously implemented activities for the reinforcement and implementation of the legal framework of the country to improve the impartiality and professionalism in the judiciary system. These include new regulations on judges, public prosecutors, law on courts, law on court council and new conditions for the election of judges.

J. CHATZIMARKAKIS mentioned that the question on lustration law was overturned by the constitutional court in March 2011 and the government announced it will suggest a new law in this area and enquired as to when the government will introduce this new law.

K. HASIPI replied that although there is a new law on lustration, parts of it have been cancelled by the constitutional courts. The key issue was the realm, scope and type of persons that would fall under this law. He insisted on a public disclosure of information for transparency.

A. PETROV insisted on a precise and clear lustration process, noted that it is vital to have a consensus, and important to respect the decisions of the constitutional court as it is the highest authority.

S. BONEVA stated that when the new law was drafted, they had the experience of new EU member states that had completed this process and the experiences of those currently dealing with this process of lustration. There was also the German Marshall fund which involved expert opinion on how to proceed with lustration in the Balkans. She noted that these recommendations clearly stated the process should not be limited to 1991, when the first democratic constitution of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was drafted when the multi party system started functioning. She noted this legislation is in accordance with EU legislation and those of EU member states who have experiences with former regimes.

Discussion on the next meeting of the JPC followed, with 30-31st October suggested.

Meeting ended at approx. 18:00.

List of participants

Members of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Mr Kenan Hasipi, DPTM, Co-Chair

Mr Andrej Petrov, SDSM, Vice-Chair

Ms Silvana Boneva, VMRO

Mr Antonijo Milososki, VMRO

Mr Arben Ljabenista, DUI

Mr Bekim Fazliu, DPA

Ms Ana Kachakova, JPC Secretariat

Ms Marijana Opashinova Shundovska, JPC Secretariat

Abbreviations:

VMRO	Democratic Union for Macedonian National Unity
SDSM	Social Democratic Union of Macedonia
DPTM	Democratic Party of Turks in Macedonia
DPA	Democratic Party of the Albanians
DUI	Democratic Union for Integration

Government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Mr Nikola Poposki, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ambassador Andrej Lepavcov, Head of Macedonian Mission to EU

Mr Vlatko Stankovski, Counselor

Members of European Parliament

Mr Jorgo Chatzimarkakis, ALDE, Germany, Co-Chair

Mr Georges Bach, PPE, Luxembourg

Mr Michael Cramer, Greens/EFA, Germany

Mr Martin Kastler, PPE, Germany

Mr Milan Zver, PPE, Slovenia

Ms Edith Bauer, PPE, Hungary

Mr Stanimir Ilchev, ALDE, Bulgaria

Mr Georgios Koumoutsakos, PPE, Greece

Mr Andrey Kovatchev, PPE, Bulgaria (replacing Ms Auconie)

Mr. Spyros Danellis, S-D, Greece (replacing Ms Podimata)

Ms Niki Tzavela, EFD, Greece (replacing Mr Salavrakos)

Mr Michal Malovec, Secretariat

Ms Marianne Lorentzen, Secretariat

Mr Robert Lauwers, Protocole

Abbreviations:

EPP	European People's Party in the EP
S&D	Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats in the EP
ALDE	Alliance of the Liberal & Democrats for Europe
Greens/EFA	Greens/European Free Alliance in the EP
EFD	European of Freedom and Democracy group; NI: Non-attached

DG Enlargement, European Commission

Ms Alexandra Cas-Granje, Director

Mr David Cullen, Head of Unit

Ms Karin Maandi, Policy Officer

European External Action Service

Mr Fernando Gentilini, Director, Western Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey

ANNEX II: Adopted recommendations

**EUROPEAN UNION-FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC
OF MACEDONIA
JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE**

10th Meeting

European Parliament

Brussels

7 June 2012

Declaration and Recommendations

The EU - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee held its 10th meeting in Brussels on 7 June 2012 under the joint Chairmanship of Mr Jorgo CHATZIMARKAKIS (ALDE, Germany) and Mr Kenan HASIPI (Democratic Party of Turks, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).

At this meeting, the Committee held an exchange of views with Mr Nikola POPOSKI, Minister of Foreign Affairs, on behalf of the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; Mr Fernando Gentilini, EEAS, Director for Western Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey, representing the Council of the European Union, and Ms Alexandra Cas Granje, Director, European Commission, DG Enlargement, Directorate B.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee addressed the following issues:

- The relations between the European Union (EU) and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
- Developments in the country in the context of the High Level Accession Dialogue (HLAD), in particular:
 - a. Inter - community relations and review of the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA);
 - b. Reforms in the field of judiciary and public administration;
 - c. Freedom of media and the recent dialogue between the government and media representatives - Overview of the situation;
 - d. Fight against corruption and organised crime;
- Economic situation in the country: strategies of the government for overcoming current challenges;
- Regional waste management and alternative energy sources: greater use of EU pre-accession funds;

Taking into account:

- A. the European Commission Progress Report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2011-2012 of 12 October 2011;
- B. the Accession Partnership adopted by the Council of the EU in February 2008;
- C. European Parliament resolution on the 2011 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia of 14 March 2012;
- D. Conclusions of the Council of the EU on enlargement and stabilisation and association process of 5 December 2011;
- E. Joint press release of the Eighth meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Council between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the EU of 23 January 2012;

F. High Level Accession Dialogue Conclusions of 15 March and 7 May 2012;

The Joint Parliamentary Committee, pursuant to Rule 3 of its Rules of Procedure, addresses the following recommendations to the institutions of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and of the European Union:

On the relations between the EU and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

1. Welcomes the launching of the High Level Accession Dialogue (HLAD) between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the European Commission on 15 March in Skopje and the commitment of the government of the country towards further progress in key areas, such as freedom of expression, rule of law and fundamental rights, public administration and electoral reform, and the strengthening of the market economy; however, reminds that HLAD should not be seen as a substitute, but a bridge leading to negotiations for membership;
2. Takes note of the conclusions of the Council of the EU of 5 December 2011 which broadly shared the Commission's assessment of the country's further progress made in key reform areas and the fulfilment of its commitments under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, in this context, asks for launching of the implementation of the second phase of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement;
3. Calls on the Council to confirm the Commission's recommendation and to give the country a date to start the accession negotiations during the next Presidency in 2012;
4. Regrets the omission of the term "Macedonian" with regard to the country's identity, culture and language in the Commission Progress Report 2011, and recommends the European Commission to re-establish its practise from previous Progress Reports;
5. Welcomes the judgement of the International Court of Justice of 5 December 2011 with respect to the Interim Agreement and states that it represents an obligation for Greece not to block the membership of the country in NATO and the start of negotiations for membership in the EU;
6. Encourages, in the forthcoming period, establishment of joint expert committees on history and education from the academies of science and arts of neighbouring countries, similar to past Franco-German cooperation in this area, with the objective of strengthening, scientific cooperation with the neighbouring countries; thus contributing to good neighbourly relations, overcoming historic tensions and achieving objective schoolbooks and education;
7. Welcomes initiatives aimed at establishing the objective truth about the recent communist history of the country, as well as attempts to

break from its remaining influence in the political, economic, academic and media life of the society, in this context, supports the public debate about the proposed new legislation intended to strengthen this process;

8. Welcomes the incoming Chairmanship of South-East European Cooperation Process of the country from June 2012 until June 2013, and emphasises the continuous participation and the constructive contribution of the country in the regional cooperation as a particularly important element for candidate and aspirant countries for membership in the EU;
9. Highlights the country's continuing involvement in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), such as taking part in the EUFOR Althea Mission as well as its contribution to the EU Battle Group II/2012, and encourages further contributions to civilian and military CSDP operations;
10. Acknowledges that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has taken a number of measures to prevent abuse of the visa free regime which remains highly important achievement for its citizens; at the same time urges for equal implementation of fundamental rights for all citizens of the country as well as for development policies addressed to the marginalised groups;
11. Highlights EU's contribution to the country's development, in particular by means of the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) since 2007 and notes that around EUR 101.8 million has been foreseen for 2012 in addition to multi-beneficiary programmes; in this regard, welcomes the conferral of management powers for four IPA components, while for the remaining one component preparations are on-going; calls on the government to use the funds and make crucial reforms necessary before EU accession;

Focus on developments in the country in the context of the High Level Accession Dialogue (HLAD)

12. Welcomes the start of the HLAD and the conclusions adopted after the two rounds held in Skopje as a joint commitment between the government of the country and the European Commission as well as the inclusiveness of the process involving the Parliament and National Council for European Integration which includes Members of Parliament and representatives of civil society; having in mind that HLAD is providing valuable support to the accession process of the country by focusing on key reform priorities;
13. In that context, commends the government for the adoption of an operational roadmap addressing the five key challenging areas by the government with specific targets and activities to be fulfilled in the following months, including freedom of expression in the media, rule of law and fundamental rights, public administration reform, electoral reform; and strengthening the market economy;

14. Welcomes the conclusions of the second round of the HLAD held in Skopje, and calls on the government to make the best use of this opportunity and deliver concrete results by the next round held in September, in order to maintain the positive recommendation of the Commission in its Progress Report on the country to be delivered in October this year;

On inter - community relations and review of the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement

15. Reiterates that the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) remains a vital pillar of democracy and rule of law in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
16. Welcomes the country's government's commitment to strengthening inter ethnic relations, notably through a comprehensive review of the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement by June 2012, in order to achieve 'integration without assimilation' in the spirit of multiculturalism;
17. Emphasises the need for adequate preparation and operational organisation of the census in accordance with the law and Eurostat standards which was regrettably called off last year in October; reiterates its call on the government to present a credible plan for implementation of the process;
18. Regrets inter-ethnic incidents since the beginning of this year and deplores killings of several citizens of the country in February and April this year followed by inter-ethnic tensions and violence; at the same time, welcomes the timely and pragmatic reactions by the Parliament, notably through its Committee on Relations Among Communities, and the responsible approach of all political parties and representatives of religious communities;
19. Highlights the country's current chairmanship of the international initiative entitled "Decade of Roma Inclusion" as well as the government's Strategy on Social Inclusion of Roma 2012-2014 which represents step for improvement of the status of the Roma; notes that some progress in the integration of Roma in several areas has been achieved, however encourages further efforts with regard to poor living conditions experienced by the Roma community and the continued discrimination in access to education, the labour market, healthcare and social services;
20. Encourages the tendency for greater inclusion of children from different ethnic groups in the education system, and urges support to be provided to that end through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance as well as specific cooperation with the OSCE in this area;

On reforms in the field of judiciary and public administration

21. Encourages further reform of the Law on Courts in order to accelerate the professionalisation of selection of judges in higher courts, however, urges the government to deliver on its commitment to undergo a review of the legal provisions on disciplinary procedures and dismissals in order to enhance independence of the judiciary;
22. Takes note of advanced preparations for important reforms of public administration, as well as some positive signs with regard to recruitment policy of the civil service, and calls on further respect for the principles of transparency, professionalism and independence in the prepared new Law on Administration; notes the need for further implementation of the principle of adequate and equitable representation in the public administration;
23. Notes that the government and political parties are committed to achieving comprehensive electoral reform, in line with the ODIHR and GRECO recommendations, by September 2012;

On freedom of media and the recent dialogue between the government and media representatives - Overview of the situation

24. Calls on the government to continue addressing the freedom of expression in the media, amongst others by means of further deepening and continuation of the inclusive dialogue with professional journalists association, and in particular with regard to decriminalisation of defamation as well as on strengthening of professional standards in journalism;
25. Takes note of the decision by the Broadcasting Council concerning conflict of interest and illegal concentration;
26. Encourages the government to take a non-selective approach to application of laws prosecuting tax fraud and public advertisement funding;

On fight against corruption and organised crime

27. Notes that corruption is still present in some areas and continues to be a serious problem and emphasises that political will is an absolute prerequisite for prevention of systemic corruption; therefore urges the government to establish a credible track record in the fight against corruption, in particular with regard to transparency of public procurement and of party financing;
28. Encourages efforts to increase the independence and impartiality of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) and calls on the government to provide it with the necessary funding and staff; in this context notes several high profile cases launched by the SCPC; however, raises concern over the selective application of the law on prevention of corruption and calls for its transparent and equal application; furthermore welcomes the legislation addressing conflict of interest;

29. Notes with concern the killing of five citizens of the country in April which is treated as suspected terrorist act and calls on state institutions, all political parties and citizens of the country to allow professional investigation of the case to continue without interference, while protecting the constitutional rights of the suspects;

On the economic situation in the country

30. Points out to the European Commission's evaluation that the country should be able to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union in the medium term, however, reminds on the high structural unemployment of around 30%, youth employment in particular;
31. Welcomes the government's commitment under HLAD to strengthen the institutional framework for better market functioning, to achieve an inclusive and effective labour market and to encourage youth employment through education, vocational training and other programmes; welcomes in this regard the preparation of the Labor Force Market Study in cooperation with the World Bank to detect the underlying causes of unemployment;
32. Supports the facilitated procedures for company registration in the country, as well as accelerated judicial procedures, the new employment strategy and improved functioning of financial markets and notes the country's appropriate macroeconomic policy mix in the context of the global crisis, achieving partial recovery of the economy, including positive economic growth rates, low indebtedness and maintenance of stable inflation;
33. Welcomes the top honours of the city of Skopje with the most improved business regulation in the past three years according to Doing Business in South East Europe 2011; also welcomes the government's public campaigns encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation and promotional activities to attract foreign investors in the state;

On regional waste management and alternative energy sources

34. Takes note of the National Waste Management Strategy 2008-2020 and the National Waste Management Plan 2009-2015 as key documents in this area;
35. Notes with satisfaction that some progress was made in the area of waste management in the recent period including adoption of the Law on Management of Batteries and Accumulators and Waste Batteries and Accumulators, following a comprehensive consultation, however notes that administrative capacity is still insufficient at both central and local level; and therefore expects sustainable financing from the

ongoing IPA funds for capacity building and for preparation of regional plans for waste management in this area;

36. Moreover notes with concern that full alignment remains a considerable challenge for the country, asks the EU for enhanced assistance in this area;
37. Welcomes progress made in the area of energy efficiency, including adoption of the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan, in line with the commitments of the Energy Efficiency Task Force of the Energy Community in 2011; furthermore highlights the fact that an energy saving campaign was carried out in the country;
38. Calls on the government and the EU to allocate sufficient resources to the Energy Agency enabling its effective promotion of energy efficiency and renewable energy sources;
39. In the area of energy efficiency encourages the Government to continue with implementation of the planned objectives; welcomes the adoption of a new rulebook on renewables and the decree for feed-in tariffs in the field of renewable energy;
40. Notes that preparations in the area of renewable energy are continuing; however calls on the country to make further progress in the use of its renewable energy potential in order to increase the share of renewable energy in final energy consumption; in this regard welcomes the fact that the first eight small hydropower plants are currently under construction; furthermore takes note of the authorisation for the construction of the pilot wind farm Bogdanci;

On transport and cross-border infrastructures

41. Stresses the importance of developing railway links as an alternative to road transport both in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and in the rest of the region; welcomes, in this regard, the government's intention to upgrade or construct the railway links from Skopje to the capitals of the neighbouring countries and calls for finalisation of the railway connections within Corridor VIII;
42. Calls on the authorities of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to open the cross-border line for hiking and biking between Stara Konjarevo and Gabrene to improve the section of the "Iron Curtain Trail" between Strumica and Petric by co-financing of the EU.