

**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 deplors 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 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.