

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

**1st MEETING
30-31 March 2005
SKOPJE**

MINUTES

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• European partnership;	
○ Internal political developments in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Including implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, local election, reform process in the fields of the judiciary and state administration);	
○ Process of economic reforms;	
○ Regional cooperation;	
○ Implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement;	
○ Implementation of EU assistance	
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 Statement

Mr Andrej ZERNOVSKI and Mr Georgios PAPASTAMKOS (EPP-ED, Greece) Co-Chairmen of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) opened the meeting at 1505hrs and introduced their members.

Mr Ljupco JORDANOVSKI, President of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), took the floor and welcomed those present. He declared that the first meeting of the EU-former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia JPC was a further step on his country's road to EU membership and that European integration would be incomplete without the Balkans. He noted that this had been recognised at the Thessaloniki Summit of June 2003, which had reconfirmed the European perspective of the countries of the region. He reminded the meeting that in 2001 his country had become the first in the region to sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) which had come into force in 2004. He outlined the Ohrid Framework Agreement for structural reform, which included the inviolability of borders and territorial integrity. He stressed the need to reach final agreement on his country's northern border. Mr Jordanovski also called for liberalisation of the current EU visa regime.

Mr ZERNOVSKI thanked Mr Jordanovski and echoed many of his words. He stressed the importance of parliamentary dialogue and noted that the establishment of the JPC would raise the level of this cooperation. He underlined that his country's application for EU membership enjoyed support across the political and ethnic spectrum. He stressed that his country had never exported its ethnic tensions to its neighbours, even during the 2001 crisis. Mr Zernovski concluded by emphasising that the Copenhagen criteria underway were an excellent framework for political reform.

Mr PAPASTAMKOS stated that MEPs were keen to make a constructive contribution to the relationship between the two sides. He applauded the result of the referendum on 7 November 2004 on the proposed law on decentralisation as a sign that the citizens of the country wanted to move closer to the EU and NATO. He underlined the importance of building confidence across the ethnic divide by the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement. Mr Papastamkos accepted that differences over the name of the country still existed and he urged agreement to be reached within the framework of the United Nations. He noted the planned accession into the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) in 2005 and the announcement that the government would sign the UN Convention on Fighting Corruption. He stressed the positive role of Foreign Direct Investment from EU member states into the country, while underlining the importance of institutional, political and regional stability in attracting further such investment. The Co-Chair concluded by stressing that former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia needed to fulfil the political, economic and social criteria set by the EU and that the Union would be on its side in its road to accession.

1.
The agenda was adopted.

2.
This item was deferred until the following day.

3.
Mrs Radmila SEKERINSKA, Deputy Prime Minister, representing the Government of former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, stressed that her country had taken a huge step by submitting its application for EU membership in March 2004. This application had broad support across the country and her government was resolved to accelerate the process of integration and accession. It aimed to obtain the status of a candidate

country by 2006 and to be ready to join by 2010. She emphasised that it should face the conditions that applied to all applicant countries and that no extra criteria should be applied.

Mrs Sekerinska noted the progress made in implementing the Ohrid Framework Agreement and referred in particular to the increased numbers of ethnic Albanians in the police force. She recognised that there had been some irregularities in the recent local elections and stressed that the authorities would implement the recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR on the election law. The Deputy Prime Minister also underlined the reforms to the judiciary, which had increased its efficiency and independence. She noted that macro-economic stability had been maintained since 1995 and that her country had become a member of the WTO in 2003. Finally Mrs Sekerinska argued for a decentralisation of EU aid and for pre-accession assistance. She highlighted too the importance of a reform of the visa regime for citizens of her country.

H.E. Mr Jean-Louis WOLZFELD, representing the Luxembourg Presidency-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, stated that the Union welcomed the start of the SAA, which was the framework for the contractual relationship between the two sides. He applauded the restoration of stability in the country since the signing of the Ohrid Agreement and the deepening of relations with the EU. The positive reform trends needed to be sustained and intensified. Mr Wolzfeld underlined the importance of strengthening the rule of law and he welcomed the government's commitment to address the irregularities in the local elections. Stating that "the road to Brussels runs through Ohrid", Mr Wolzfeld emphasised the crucial importance of continuing to implement the Framework Agreement. He underlined the need for economic development, reducing bureaucracy and fighting corruption. He concluded by stressing that 2005 was a crucial year for former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's road to the EU as the Commission studied the membership application that the Skopje government had presented.

H.E. Mr Donato CHIARINI, representing the European Commission, took up many of these themes such as the Ohrid Framework and the need to create a business-friendly environment. On the local elections he stressed the need for a non-partisan electoral administration. He noted that the prospect of EU accession had been a catalyst for reform in many applicant countries and stressed the crucial role of the parliament in this process. In particular he commended the work of the Committee for European Issues.

Mrs Karolina RISTOVA, Chairperson of the Committee for European Issues, gave details of the structure of her committee. It had 13 members with cross party representation and had already been very active having held 19 sessions. It sought to monitor the implementation of the harmonisation of legislation with EU legislation. It co-ordinated its work with other committees and hoped to have access to the legal services of the EU. The Committee could give direct opinions and reports to the government. Mrs Ristova argued that her Committee was a transparent body and that the documents were readily available on the Internet. It also had close links with NGOs. She concluded by underlining that there was a general political consensus in the country in favour of EU accession.

Mr Erik MEIJER (GUE/NGL, Netherlands) rapporteur of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's application for membership of the EU, noted that no date had yet been set for the start of accession negotiations. However he was sure that these would start when the Copenhagen criteria had been fulfilled. He underlined the importance of implementing the Ohrid Framework and reaching agreement on the name for the country. Mr Meijer touched on other issues such as the visa problem, the demarcation of the border and the need to tackle unemployment. He also noted that the Skopje government had a different position on the International Criminal Court to that of the EU.

Mr Slobodan CHASHULE argued that his country needed to implement the rules of the EU for its own good, as the process of meeting the relevant criteria would promote security and stability. He did not believe that Skopje should be concentrating on strict dates but should be ensuring that the implementation of the "acquis" met the highest standards. He looked for the EU to give a helping hand in overcoming the challenges faced, such as corruption and organised crime. If the country did not integrate into the EU, he warned, it would be a "constant black hole" to its neighbours.

Mr Gyula HEGYI (PES, Hungary) warned that the region was still fragile, notably in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina. It was in the own interests of EU applicant countries to meet the conditions of becoming EU members. The authorities in Skopje should not expend all their efforts on getting dates for accession, as it was more important to meet the conditions of membership first. He noted that the Copenhagen criteria could only be fulfilled when the economic conditions were satisfactory. Public confidence, for example, was essential in order to have a fully functioning banking system. He reminded the meeting that there was not equality of treatment for citizens of all EU member states on the visa issue, as some new member states still required visas to enter the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mr Panagiotis BEGLITIS (PES, Greece) referred to the success of the EU in overcoming problems in member states such as war, ethnic conflict, poverty and underdevelopment. He stressed that there was general support in Greece for the integration of the Balkans into the Union as the countries in the region were privileged allies. He warned of tough negotiations ahead and stressed the need to implement the "acquis". He noted too that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had broken with the EU on the issue of the International Criminal Court. He underlined the need for realism in reaching agreement on the name for the country.

Mr Jelko KACIN (ALDE, Slovenia) emphasised the importance of strengthening further the role of the Parliament. He stressed the need for consensus across all ethnic groups and civil society and for a multilateral approach with all 25 member states. The process of closer integration with the EU would blaze a trail for the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and for the citizens of Albania.

Mr Jani MAKRADULI gave details of the Action Plan for the implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. These included an accelerated implementation of the Ohrid Agreement and the creation of a favourable business climate. He stressed that all ministries had been involved in the elaboration of the Plan and that it set precise and defined deadlines. Indeed 15% of the government budget was devoted to the Plan.

Mr Sepp KUSSTATSCHER (Greens/EFA, Italy) gave details of the framework that applied in the South Tyrol region of Italy where 65-66% of the population was German speaking. He commended in particular the benefits of multilingualism where everyone learned at least two languages from an early age.

Mrs Teuta ARIF noted that she had visited the South Tyrol region to see how multi-ethnicity might operate. She stressed that the Ohrid Agreement had saved the country from an escalation of the conflict. Commenting that it was better to invest in interpreters and translators than in guns she commended the European Parliament as a model of multilingualism. She emphasised the right for students to receive higher education in their own language. The creation of the third state-funded university in Tetovo had led to an increase from 6% to 15% of ethnic Albanians in higher education, of whom 50% were women. She welcomed the fact that the referendum last year appeared to indicate that the policy of decentralisation had the support of the majority of the population. Mrs Arif argued that the increase in the numbers of ethnic Albanians in the uniformed police force was more marked as the deadlines for implementation of this policy had been clear. However, she stressed, there was a need to do more to employ ethnic Albanians in the administration and to reform the administrative structures.

Mrs Mojca DRCAR MURKO (ALDE, Slovenia) wanted the region to be stabilised and a clear membership perspective for the country, which could provide a catalyst for the process of political and economic reform.

Mr Zamir DILKA stated that the Ohrid Agreement would be really implemented when it was operating a grass roots level and the JPC should have a role in monitoring its implementation. He stressed that there were still problems in the country and noted that his party - the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) had boycotted the second round of the local elections.

The meeting adjourned at 1830hrs and resumed at 0900hrs on the following day.

Mrs Lilijana IVANOVSKA stressed the importance of the recent local elections because of the decentralisation brought about by the Ohrid Framework Agreement. She accepted that there had been anomalies and underlined the need for political consensus to tackle the irregularities that had been identified. The perpetrators of frauds needed to be dismissed. She gave details of the results, expressing particular satisfaction that the proportion of women elected had increased to 22.7% of the total, with greater representation of women from ethnic minorities. Mrs Ivanovska noted too that NGOs had covered 60% of polling stations. In answer to a question from Mrs Drcar Murko she stated that the irregularities included ballot stuffing, tearing up of ballots and family voting.

Mr Nezdet MUSTAFA stressed that the Roma sought to become integrated into society and especially to gain greater access to education. He noted that a Roma MEP had come to Skopje and made a good impression. Mr KACIN remarked that there were two Roma MEPs in the European Parliament and that it would adopt a special resolution on International Roma Day. In his view the Roma refugees did not receive enough attention and the European Parliament's resolution should push politicians to do more.

Mr CHASHULE stressed that on 29 March 2005 all opposition parties had signed a declaration urging the elections authorities to annul the second round of voting in seven municipalities where irregularities had been identified. Mrs Diamanto MANOLAKOU (GUE/NGL, Greece) underlined that it was essential to have free and fair elections, otherwise the citizens would not respect the authorities. Mr Jani MAKRADULI stated that irregularities had taken place in 1.7% of polling stations. Mr HEGYI considered that lessons could be learned from the Hungarian approach to dealing with the Roma. He considered that boycotting the elections sent out the wrong signal. Those who were unhappy about irregularities should take their complaints to the courts. Mr PALECKIS asked how active ordinary citizens had been in reporting on irregularities and wondered what the role of the mass media was in the elections. In answer to his further question about the punishments for committing irregularities, Mr ZERNOVSKI stated that prison sentences of up to five years were possible. Mr MUSTAFA condemned the actions in a constituency where the 23% of ethnic Albanians had taken away the right of the Roma to have control over a municipality.

Mrs Cvetanka IVANOVA gave details of the reform of the judiciary, especially the justice system. She noted that the signing of the SAA, and the necessity of approximating Macedonian legislation to that of the EU, had led to the reform. She stressed that the political will existed to implement the reforms, which would be three pronged - substantive, procedural and structural - and were set out in the Action Plan for the implementation of the SAA. In particular she referred to the importance of having an effective system of appointment for judges and that the judiciary should be financially independent. Mrs Ivanova also underlined the need for downsizing the public administration and reducing red tape.

Mr KACIN emphasised the importance of this issue and that implementation was imperative. He referred to the problems of translation, noting that the word "accountability" did not exist in Slavic languages. Mrs IVANOVA stressed again that there was a general consensus that the reform of the judiciary was a priority. Citizens could already apply to the European Court of Human Rights.

Turning to the economic situation, Mr MINGOVA-KREPIEVA noted that there had been insufficient development. On the positive side there was macro-economic stability and price stability. There were no public deficits and the economy had been liberalised. However the levels of unemployment and poverty remained high. There was a low level of savings and investment and there had been a sharp decline in industrial production owing to the closure of loss making companies. He gave details of new legislation, specifically a Company Law that sought to simplify procedures in this area, and a Consumer Protection Law. There had also been significant structural reforms, notably in the transport sector. Mr Mingova-Krepieva stressed that it was essential to maintain macro-economic stability and that becoming a candidate country for the EU would stimulate the economy.

Mr ANASTASOVSKI gave details of the cooperation of parliament in the region, noting that this cooperation had become more formalised. He referred to an agreement with Croatia on EU integration and

Memoranda of Understanding on the fight against crime with the countries of the region. In general the relations with neighbouring countries were good or improving.

Mr Zoran KRSTEVSKI noted that there had been limited economic development in the early 1990s because of wars in the region and the closure of the border with Greece. He pointed to the significant institutional development and the desire of the country to become a candidate for EU membership as soon as possible.

Mrs DRCAR MURKO underlined the need for a transparent business climate in which entrepreneurs were confident that their money was safe. In order to attract foreign investment it was essential to create economic stability and establish the rule of law.

Mrs SAMOILOVSKA-CVETANOVA argued for the consistent implementation of the law on fiscal decentralisation. She noted that certain ethnic communities would dominate certain districts and that it was essential that facilities were in place to prevent any discrimination against minorities.

2.

The Rules of Procedure were adopted with amendments. It was stressed that - subject to technical limitations - it would be possible to hold meetings in other locations in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia than Skopje.

4.

Mrs SAMOILOVSKA-CVETANOVA argued in favour of a relaxation of the visa regime. It was important to sign readmission agreements, prepare new passports and ensure effective border crossings. There should be equal access to the country for citizens of all EU member states.

Mr HEGYI stressed that it was a basic principle for the EU that all countries were equal and should be in visa agreements with third countries. Mrs IVANOVSKA wanted to remove the requirement for diplomats to have visas and she noted that parliamentarians from her country needed a visa to enter the Schengen countries.

Mr CHASHULE argued that "young Macedonians who are future citizens of the EU" should be allowed to travel freely. Mr KACIN opposed this proposal, contending that it would represent discrimination according to age. The discussion on the visa regime should be on the basis of human rights and civil liberties.

Mrs SAMOILOVSKA-CVETANOVA considered that there are no political obstacles to the lifting of the visas regime and that simply technical requirements needed to be met.

5.

The final joint statement was adopted with amendments. Mr KUSSTATSCHER wanted to stress that the issue of the International Criminal Court should be raised.

6.

There was no other business

7.

The next meeting was scheduled to take place in Brussels on 28-29 November 2005.

**DELTAGERLISTE/ANWESENHEITSLISTE/ΚΑΤΑΣΤΑΣΗ ΠΑΡΟΝΤΩΝ/RECORD
OF ATTENDANCE/LISTA DE ASISTENCIA/LISTE DE PRESENCE/ELENCO DEI
PRESENTI/PRESENTIELIJST/LISTA DE PRESENÇAS/LÄSNÄOLOLISTA/DELTAGARLISTA**

Til stede	Formandskabet/Vorstand/Προεδρείο/Bureau/Ufficio di Presidenza/Mesa/Puhemiehistö/J.L. Presidium: (*) PAPASTAMKOS (P), HEGYI (VP)
Anwesend	Medlemmer/Mitglieder/Μέλη/Members/Diputados/Députés/Deputati/Leden/Deputados/jäsenet/ DRCAR MURKO, KUSSTATSCHER
Παρόντες	Stedfortrædere/Stellvertreter/Αναπληρωτές/Substitutes/Suplentes/Suppléants/ Membri supplenti/Plaatsvervangers/Membros suplentes/Varajäsenet/Suppleanter: B EGLITIS, KACIN, MANOLAKOU, PALECKIS
Present	Rapporteur: MEIJER
Presentes	Members of the FYROM delegation: ZERNOVSKI (P), ARIFI, Teuta (VP), CHASHULE (VP)
Présents	ANASTASOVSKI, ARIFI, Jusuf; BISLIMOVSKI, DIKA, GASHOSKA, IVANOVA, IVANOVSKA, JASARI, KEDEV, KOSTADINOVA, KRSTEVSKI, MAKRADULI, MINGOVA-KREPIEVA, MUMINOVIK, MUSTAFA, NASUFI, OROVCANEC, RUSTEMI, SAMOILOVSKA-CVETANOVA, SARAC, STOJANOSKI, VEJSELI, VITANOVSKI
Presenti	
Aanwezig	
Läsnä	
Närvarande	
Art. 147,7	
Art. 166,3	
Art. 162.6 Endv. Deltog/Weitere Teiln./ Συμμετείχαν επίσης/Also present Participaron igualmente/ Participaient également/ Hanno partecipato altresì/ Andere deelnemers/ Outros participantes/ Muut osallistujat/ Dessutom deltog	H. E. Donato CHIARINI, European Commission Delegation in Skopje Ms Radmila SEKERINSKA, Deputy Prime Minister, FYROM Mr Ljupco JORDANOVSKI, President of the Assembly of FYROM Ms Karolina RISTOVA, Chairperson of the Committee for European Issues, FYROM
(Dagsorden/Tagesordnung Pkt/Ημερήσια Διάταξη Σημεί/Point OJ/Punto OG/Agenda Punt/Ordem do dia- punto/punto orden del dia/ Esityslista Kohta/Föredragningslista punkt):	

* (P) =Formand/Vorsitzender/Πρόεδρος/Chairman/Président/Presidente/Voorzitter/Presidente/Puhemies/Ordförande
(VP) =Næstform./Stellv. Vorsitz./Αντιπρόεδρος/Vice-Chairman/Vice-Président/Vicepresidente/Varapuhemies
Ondervoorz./Vice-Pres./Vicepres/Vice ordförande.

Til stede den/Anwesend am/Παρόν στις/Present on/Présent le/Presente il/Aanwezig op/Presente em/Presente el/Läsnä/Närvarande den.

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)

<p>Efter indbydelse fra formanden/Auf Einladung d. Vorsitzenden/Με πρόσκληση του Προέδρου/At the invitation of the Chairman/Por invitación del presidente/Sur l'invitation du président/Su invito del presidente/Op uitnodiging van de voorzitter/A convite do presidente/Puhemiehen kutsusta/På ordförandens inbjudan:</p> <p>Radet/Rat/Συμβούλιο/Council/Consejo/Conseil/Consiglio/Raad/Conselho/Neuvosto/Rådet: (*)</p> <p>Kommissionen/Kommission/Επιτροπή/Commission/Comisión/Commissione/Commissie/Comissão/Komissio/Kommissionen: (*)</p> <p>C.E.S.:</p>		
<p>Andre deltagere/Andere Teilnehmer Επίσης Παρόντες/Also present Otros participantes/Autres participants/Altri partecipanti Andere aanwezigen/Outros participantes Muut osallistajat/Övriga deltagare</p>		F
<p>Gruppernes sekretariat Sekretariat der Fraktionen Γραμματεία των Πολ. Ομάδων Secretariat political groups Secr. de los grupos políticos Secr. groupes politiques Segr. dei gruppi politici Secr. van de fracties Secr. dos grupos políticos Puoluerhmién sihteeristö Gruppernas sekretariat</p>	<p>PPE-DE PSE ALDE Verts/ALE GUE/NGL UEN EDD NI</p>	<p>TUSAR VANDEN BROUCKE BERGAMASCHI</p>
Cab. du Président		.
Cab. du Secrétaire Général		
<p>Generaldirektorat Generaldirektion Γενική Διεύθυνση Directorate-General Dirección general Direction générale Direzione generale Directoraat-generaal Direcção general Contrôle financier Service juridique Pääosasto Generaldirektorat</p>	<p>I II III IV V VI VII VIII</p>	
<p>Udvalgssekretariatet Ausschußsekretariat Γραμματεία επιτροπής Committee secretariat Secretaria de la comisión Secrétariat de la commission Segretariato della commissione Commissiesecretariaat Secretaria de comissão Valiokunnan sihteeristö Utskottssekretariatet</p>		<p>OLSEN, BODEN</p>
Assist./Βοηθός		d'AGOSTO, TUXEN

- * (P) =Formand/Pres./Πρόεδρος/Chairman/Président/Voorzitter/Puhemies/Ordförande
 (VP) =Næstform./Vize-Pres./Αντιπρόεδρος/Vice-Chairman/Vice-Président/Ondervoorz./Vice-pres/Varapuhemies/Vice ordförande.
 (M) =Medlem./Mitglied/Μέλος/Member/Miembro/Membre/Membro/Lid/Membro/Jäsen/Ledamot
 (F) =Tjenestemand/Beamter/Υπάλληλος/Official/Funcionario/Fonctionnaire/Funzionario/Ambtenaar/
 Functionário/Virkamies/Tjänsteman

EUROPEAN UNION-former YUGOSLAV
REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA
JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

1st JPC meeting
SKOPJE

Final Statement

31 March 2005
HO/VT

The Joint Parliamentary Committee EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia held its 1st meeting in Skopje on 30 - 31 March 2005 under the joint Chairmanship of Mr Andrej ZERNOVSKI and Mr Georgios PAPASTAMKOS. At this meeting, the Committee held an exchange of views with Dr. Ljupco JORDANOVSKI, President of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ms. Radmila SEKERINSKA, Deputy Prime Minister, representing the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, H.E. Mr. Jean-Louis WOTZFELD, Ambassador in charge of the Western Balkans, representing the Luxembourg Presidency-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, H.E. Mr Donato CHIARINI, representing the European Commission, Ms Karolina RISTOVA, Chairperson of the Committee for European Issues of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Mr Erik MEIJER, rapporteur of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs.

The JPC addressed the following issues:

- The integration of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the EU
- Internal political developments in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in particular the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement
- Process of economic reforms and regional cooperation
- Implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement
- Implementation of EU assistance
- Liberalisation of the visa regimes

In accordance with Rule 3 of its Rules of Procedure the Joint Parliamentary Committee addressed the following recommendations to the Stabilisation and Association Council, the institutions of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and of the European Union:

- A. having regard to the European Commission Country Strategy Paper 2002-2006 for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the European Commission Stabilisation and Association Report 2004 for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
 1. welcomes the decisions of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the European Parliament to set up a Joint Parliamentary Committee to consider all aspects of relations between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the European Union and, in particular, the implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement;
 2. welcomes the consensus on accession to the EU achieved by all political parties represented in the Assembly and broadly supported by the population, and the Declaration in Support of the Strategic Interest of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia signed in Ohrid under the auspices of the President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Joint Statement of the political parties for full membership of the Republic to the EU, signed by the parliamentary political parties under the auspices of the Prime minister of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
 3. welcomes the fact that the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Union and its Member States and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has entered into force on 1 April 2004; commends the work done to comply with the obligations of the Agreement and urges the Government to devote sufficient resources to this process;
 4. welcomes the Government's answers to the European Commission questionnaire on the politic and economic issues and the EU acquis; expect the Commission to deliver its opinion on the application of former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for EU membership as soon as possible; stresses that obtaining candidate status at the December 2005 EU Summit will encourage the country to achieve further results in the reform process, and will strengthen stability in the region;
 5. welcomes the adoption of the Action Plan for European Partnership as one of the instruments for EU integration;
 6. welcomes the important progress made in implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and calls for continued efforts from the Government to implement fully the Framework Agreement;

7. notes the concrete efforts made to reduce ethnic tension; underlines that the creation of a new State University in Tetovo has been a highly symbolic development in this field and is recognised as an important measure to improve inter-ethnic confidence;
8. welcomes the newly founded Departments in the Ministry of the Interior and invites the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to continue its reforms of the judicial system in line with the adopted Government Strategy for Reforms in the Judiciary and to continue the fight against corruption and organised crime, including trafficking;
9. welcomes the announcement that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia will sign the 2003 UN Convention on Fighting Corruption by the end of this year;
10. emphasises the importance of the final demarcation of the state border of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with Serbia and Montenegro, in the area adjoining Kosovo, prior to opening talks of the final status of Kosovo;
11. notes the continuing macro-economic stabilisation in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and calls on the Government to strengthen economic growth and accelerate implementation of comprehensive structural reforms; notes that the weaknesses in the functioning of the economy, fight against corruption, business climate, competitiveness issues and the enforcement of property rights are increasingly a challenge for the successful transition of the country; however, welcomes the good results achieved in controlling inflation, and the measures taken in the privatisation area, as well as the focus on private sector development in order to create a more favourable business environment;
12. recommends introducing decentralisation of the EU assistance to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, thus enabling preparation for the effective implementation of the pre-accession instrument envisaged within the New Financial Perspective 2007-2013;
13. recognises the importance of liberalisation of the EU visa regime for the citizens of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; urges the EU to commence the dialogue on this topic, which should be followed by concrete measures for visa liberalisation; recommends the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to provide equal visa regimes to all EU Member Countries;
14. takes the view that the various EU bodies acting in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia should improve their coordination; is of the opinion, in this regard, that the European Commission should play a pivotal role in the implementation of the EU policies in the country;
15. commends the work done by the EU Mission PROXIMA and the cooperation provided by the national authorities; looks forward to its successful completion by the end of the year; provided that further reforms are supported by twinning projects;
16. recognises the leading role of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the process of regional cooperation and its strong commitment to foster good relations with all countries in the SEE region.