

## **P7\_TA(2011)0151**

### **2010 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

#### **European Parliament resolution of 7 April 2011 on the 2010 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the European Council decision of 16 December 2005 to grant the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the status of candidate country for EU membership and to the Presidency Conclusions issued following the European Councils of 15 and 16 June 2006 and 14 and 15 December 2006,
  - having regard to UNSC Resolutions 845 (1993) and 817 (1993), and to the 1995 Interim Accord between the Hellenic Republic and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,
  - having regard to the Commission's 2010 Progress Report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (SEC(2010)1332) and the Commission Communication of 9 November 2010 entitled 'Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2010-2011' (COM(2010)0660),
  - having regard to its resolution of 10 February 2010 on the 2009 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia<sup>1</sup>,
  - having regard to the recommendations of the EU – former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee of 30 November 2010,
  - having regard to Council Decision 2008/212/EC of 18 February 2008 on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the Accession Partnership with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia<sup>2</sup>,
  - having regard to the conclusions of the General Affairs and Foreign Affairs Councils of 13 and 14 December 2010,
  - having regard to Rule 110(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the process of EU enlargement is a powerful driver for peace, stability and reconciliation in the region,
- B. whereas in 2005 the European Council granted candidate status to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia but has failed ever since to set a date for the opening of negotiations, in spite of the substantial progress made by that country on its path towards the EU; whereas bilateral issues should not represent and be used as an obstacle in the accession process, although they should be settled before membership; whereas continuation of the accession process would contribute to the stability of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and would further strengthen inter-ethnic dialogue,

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 341 E ,16.12.2010, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 80, 19.3.2008, p. 32.

- C. whereas intensifying economic dialogue and cooperation with the enlargement countries enables the EU to focus together on overcoming the economic crisis and contributes to the Union's global competitiveness,
- D. whereas the 2010 enlargement strategy highlights as priorities the reform of public administration and the judiciary, the fight against organised crime and corruption, and the dialogue among political actors,
- E. whereas the EU operates comprehensive approval procedures that ensure new members are admitted only when they have met all requirements, and only with the active consent of the EU institutions and of the EU Member States,
- F. whereas freedom of expression and the independence of the media remain a concern in most of the enlargement countries,

### ***Political developments***

1. Shares the assessment by the Commission's 2010 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and regrets that the Council has not taken a decision on the opening of accession negotiations, as recommended by the Commission for a second year in a row and in line with previous Parliament resolutions; recalls its previous recommendation to the Council to start the negotiations immediately;
2. Notes the recent political developments leading to the early elections; calls on all political parties to play an active and constructive role in the process of preparing the elections; emphasises that free and fair elections conducted on the basis of full transparency and in line with international standards are an important element of a consolidated democracy; calls on all political parties actively to participate in the elections; is concerned at the current political situation and appeals to all political leaders to seek consensus on the basis of democratic institutions;
3. Points out that bilateral issues need to be resolved by the parties concerned in a good neighbourly spirit and taking overall EU interests into account; appeals to all the key players and parties concerned to step up their efforts and to demonstrate responsibility and determination for solving all outstanding issues which are not only hindering the accession process of the candidate country, and the EU's own policy in the region, but could also have repercussions on inter-ethnic relations, regional stability and economic development;
4. Congratulates the country on the 10th anniversary of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which remains the cornerstone of inter-ethnic relations in the country, and calls on the government and all state institutions to use this landmark anniversary as a means to encourage the continuous fostering of inter-ethnic cooperation and trust; is, however, concerned by growing inter-ethnic tensions over the construction on the site of the Kale fortress in Skopje; appeals to all political and religious leaders and media outlets to act responsibly, refraining from any actions which could increase inter-ethnic tensions; notes with concern the risk of a growing isolationist mentality, which could develop as a substitute policy in the absence of a tangible EU perspective;
5. Calls on the government to foster a comprehensive dialogue between the ethnic communities, to take due account of the sensitivities of all the communities and minorities in its decisions, such as the urban plan for 'Skopje 2014', and to avoid acts and initiatives

aimed at strengthening the national identity at the expense of other communities; draws attention to the need for effective functioning of the parliamentary committee on inter-ethnic relations in the integration of the minorities in the legislative process and emphasises that additional efforts are necessary to take forward the decentralisation process in line with the Ohrid Framework Agreement;

6. Regrets that the UN mediation efforts to solve the name dispute have not yielded concrete results;

***Democracy, the rule of law and human rights***

7. Recalls that a healthy political culture is the foundation of democracy; calls on the opposition parties to end the boycott of the national parliament and resume the political dialogue within institutions; considers that it is the responsibility of the government and opposition to ensure immediate and open dialogue on all the existing challenges which the country is facing; points out that political instability could affect the European integration process, which should be a common shared priority for all the components of society; welcomes the adoption of the amendments to the rules of procedure of the parliament, allowing for stronger engagement by the opposition in its work; is, however, concerned that there is insufficient dialogue between the government and opposition parties and a general climate of distrust and confrontation; urges both sides to foster a climate of trust and to show strong commitment to using the new parliamentary rules of procedure in order to strengthen the political dialogue and constructive cooperation in the legislative process and in parliamentary scrutiny of the government's activities;
8. Welcomes the political will to complete the long overdue announcement of names of agents affiliated to the former Yugoslav secret services as a major step toward breaking with the old Communist era; however, notes insufficient progress with the full enforcement of the relevant laws; urges the government to complete the lustration process without delay, avoiding using it selectively for political purposes, such as political self-legitimation or the defamation of political opponents;
9. Pays tribute to the excellent work of the outgoing EU Special Representative/Head of EU Delegation; condemns the inappropriate attacks by politicians of the governing party on EU representatives and regrets that the government has not unequivocally and publicly dissociated itself from such insults; considers these incidents to be extremely detrimental to the country's image;
10. Draws attention to the need to improve the electoral legislation in order to bring it into line with the OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission's recommendations set out in the report on the presidential and local elections of 2009;
11. Reiterates that free and independent media are a necessary precondition for the development of a stable democracy; notes the existence of a wide variety and mix of public and private media outlets in the country; expresses concern, however, at the politicisation of the media and interference in their work; is worried about the economic dependence and the concentration of political power of the media, which often result in a lack of editorial independence and in poor standards of journalism; is concerned at a considerable deterioration in media freedom in the country, as shown by the significant drop (from 34th to 68th position) in the Reporters Without Borders' 2010 press ranking; notes the fact that the Ministry of Interior posted on its home page a call to citizens to denounce 'non-

objective' press reports, calls on journalists to uphold high professional standards in their work, distance themselves from political influences and establish professional associations for journalists, while at the same time urging the authorities responsible to strengthen the independence and freedom of the media, applying equal standards to all of them and improving the transparency of their ownership;

12. Welcomes the numerous laws passed for judicial reform and calls for further intensive efforts in the reform of the judiciary, in order to ensure its professionalism, efficiency and independence from political pressures; to this end, underlines that the existing legal framework needs to be implemented swiftly and effectively; is concerned at the continuous role of the Ministry of Justice in the Judicial Council and at the criticism of the Constitutional Court by the government and parliamentarians, which create the risk of subjecting the judiciary to political interference; nevertheless, notes with satisfaction that, in spite of these disagreements, all court rulings have been implemented; welcomes the efforts to increase the efficiency and transparency of the court system, in particular the decreasing backlog of cases in most of the courts; equally, welcomes the entry into force of the law on legal aid;
13. Welcomes the continued efforts in the fight against corruption, manifested amongst other things by implementation of the second round of GRECO recommendations and the entry into force of the amendments to the Criminal Code; encourages the authorities to continue implementing legislation to combat corruption and improving the independence, efficiency and resources of the judiciary; however, recalls that corruption remains prevalent and calls for further intensive efforts to eradicate it; stresses the urgency of effective and impartial enforcement of anti-corruption legislation, in particular on the financing of political parties and on conflicts of interest; draws attention to the importance of ensuring that the court system functions free of political interference; welcomes the efforts to increase the efficiency and transparency of the court system; stresses the need to build up an enforcement record for prosecutions and convictions against which progress can be measured; calls for the unification of jurisprudence in order to ensure a predictable judicial system and public trust;
14. Calls on the Commission to prepare, with its next Progress Report, an assessment of the impact and results achieved from the allocation of EU funds to reform of the judiciary and the fight against corruption; calls on the Commission to provide the Council and Parliament with a more detailed assessment of the efficiency of anti-corruption measures taken by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the case of public procurement and fraud, and to present it together with the next Progress Report;
15. Recognises the efforts made in public administration reform but calls for further efforts in the field, which continues to be politicised and lacks capacities and professionalism; welcomes the government's adoption of a National Strategy for Public Administration Reform and the creation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement's subcommittee on public administration reform; is concerned at the non-transparent and ad hoc process of converting temporary posts into permanent ones, entailing further politicisation of the administration; calls for the development of a clear human resources strategy, defining the needs of administration in terms of capacities and skills and its implementation through merit-based recruitment and career development; welcomes the increased recruitment of non-majority communities but underlines that it should be carried out on the basis of assessment of needs in the administration, in order to ensure that the skills of new

employees match the job requirements;

16. Commends the continuing progress in the field of decentralisation; notes, however, that adequate budgets should accompany the transfer of responsibilities to lower authorities;
17. Welcomes the progress achieved as regards reform of the prison system; however, remains seriously concerned at the degrading conditions in some prisons, in particular overcrowding and an inadequate healthcare system; emphasises the need to respect the principle that persons in detention should be subject to appropriate treatment, in accordance with the UN principles;
18. Welcomes the adoption of the law on the 2011 population and household census, emphasises the need for adequate preparation and operational organisation in order to conduct an accurate census; calls on the government to allocate appropriate funds for its organisation and stresses the importance of de-politicising the issue in order to have an unbiased census with the widest possible participation;
19. Underlines the utmost significance of ensuring that the education system supports ethnic integration; to this end, welcomes the strategy of integrated education and calls for its swift implementation, amongst other things by phasing out segregation on ethnic lines and increasing the learning of all the official languages in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; calls on the government to improve the process for consulting the different communities and to cooperate with them closely in implementation of the strategy;
20. Identifies a lack of progress in the joint celebration of historic events shared with neighbouring EU Member States with the aim of contributing to a better understanding of history and good neighbourly relations, as stressed by the previous report; urges the introduction of school textbooks free of ideological interpretations of history;
21. Is seriously concerned at the situation of the Roma community, which continues to face dire living conditions and discrimination in access to the labour market, healthcare and social services; underlines particularly the difficult situation of Roma girls and women, who continue to suffer from double discrimination, based on both ethnicity and gender; calls on the government for a stronger commitment to implementing the Roma strategy and the action plan for the Roma Decade; in this regard, welcomes the government's activities aiming at political integration of the Roma, including having a minister of Roma ethnicity in charge of issues pertaining to the Roma community; commends the government for convening a meeting on the subject of Roma integration while holding the Presidency of the Council of Europe;
22. Welcomes the adoption of the anti-discrimination law as a vital step to combat discriminatory practices, which are still widespread, and calls for its swift and effective implementation; however, regrets that, contrary to European legislation, sexual orientation has been omitted from the law as a ground for discrimination; calls for the swift alignment of national provisions in this field with the *acquis* and for strengthening of the monitoring mechanisms, and emphasises that this is a prerequisite for accession; is concerned at the course taken by the selection procedure for members of the Commission for protection against discrimination; regrets that no representative from civil society has been appointed to the Commission; calls for further efforts to be made concerning the rights of women, to increase their participation in the labour market and in political and business decision-making and to protect women and children from domestic violence;

23. Calls for more efforts in the field of gender equality and women's rights; encourages the authorities to fully implement the Law on Equal Opportunities between men and women and to ensure that the national action plan for gender equality becomes more consistent; welcomes the adoption of the strategy in the fight against domestic violence; calls for the implementation of a victim support system; urges the government and the non-governmental sector to promote greater awareness of these issues;
24. Condemns recent cases of intimidation and direct attacks on civil society organisations and personal defamation of their leading activists; welcomes the mechanisms for consulting civil society organisations introduced by the government but is concerned that there is no systematic and transparent mechanism for consulting civil society on national development policies, legislation, programmes or other strategic documents; stresses the need to involve civil society organisations in the policy-making process in an unselective manner in order to stimulate effective public debate and include stakeholders in the accession process of the country; stresses the crucial role of civil society in contributing to enhanced regional cooperation on social and political aspects; commends the adoption of the new Law on Citizen's Associations and urges the authorities to implement the provisions on 'public benefit' organisations by securing funding schemes as soon as possible;
25. Notes with satisfaction that IPA assistance works well in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; encourages both its government and the Commission to simplify the administration procedure for IPA funding, with the aim of making it more accessible to smaller and non-centralised civil organisations, trade unions and other beneficiaries;
26. Emphasises that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has ratified the eight core labour rights conventions of the ILO; is concerned that only modest progress has been made in the field of labour rights and trade unions; calls on the authorities to further strengthen labour and trade union rights, in this regard also encourages the government to secure sufficient administrative capacity for the proper implementation and enforcement of the labour law; points to the important role of the social dialogue and encourages the government to step up its ambitions in and establish an all-inclusive social dialogue with relevant partners;
27. Underlines the importance of preserving and maintaining the cultural heritage, which is a pillar of European values and principles; notes with regret that numerous cemeteries, fresco inscriptions and artefacts, which belong to the Bulgarian cultural heritage, have been totally abandoned and ruined;
28. Welcomes the progress of the country towards a functioning market economy and a broad consensus on fundamental aspects of the country's economic policy; commends the government for maintaining macroeconomic stability, despite the negative impact of the global financial crisis, and notes the good prospects for economic growth in upcoming years;

### ***Socio-economic developments***

29. Is concerned at the persistent and very high unemployment, in particular among young people, which is common to many of the countries in the region; calls on the government to swiftly implement more efficient measures for improving public investment, focused on employment policies and employment of the labour force in high-quality, stable and decent jobs; calls on the Commission to assist the authorities with increased assistance from the

IPA;

30. Notes the improvement in the business climate as a consequence of the economic reforms undertaken over the past years and stresses the need for continuous structural reform in the country; notes at the same time that foreign investment has further decreased from an already low level, and that the situation was worsened by the global financial crisis; calls on the state agencies responsible for attracting foreign direct investment to strengthen their efforts to attract potential foreign investors;
31. Congratulates the government on the effective and smooth implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU; to this end, welcomes the recent government decision to abolish the customs tariffs on over a hundred different products as a step towards full trade liberalisation with the EU; hopes that these changes will increase the competitiveness of domestic producers, thereby stimulating greater economic growth; considers this development to be an important milestone demonstrating the country's efforts to withstand the increased competition that it will face once it becomes EU member;
32. Emphasises the need to apply the principles of good governance in budgetary spending by improving free access to public information, consulting stakeholders in the budgetary procedure and establishing a reporting mechanism, thereby assuming accountability for the money spent; recalls that non-transparent budget spending leads to social exclusion and conflict, and questions the legitimacy of some national campaigns;
33. Welcomes the recent adoption of the Energy Act with the purpose of liberalising the country's electricity market, which is in line with the relevant European directives;
34. Stresses the importance of developing an efficient and reliable public transport system both inside the country and at regional level (including the Sofia-Skopje-Tirana railway link); to this end, reiterates its appeal to the authorities to invest in the maintenance and upgrading of the railway network as a viable alternative to the road system; regrets the government's decision to decrease investment in the annual railway infrastructure programme and calls on the Commission to provide the necessary technical and financial assistance within the framework of the IPA;
35. Calls on the authorities of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria to re-open the cross-border line for pedestrians and cyclists between Staro Konjarevo and Gabrene, in order to improve the section of the Iron Curtain trail between Strumica and Petric;
36. Welcomes the adoption of the national strategy for sustainable development, but calls for more effort to implement legislation in the field of the environment and to provide adequate funds to this end; in particular, draws attention to the challenges in the areas of water quality, waste management and nature protection; calls for closer cooperation on transboundary environmental issues, based on the EU standards; in this regard, reiterates its call for effective monitoring of the quality and level of the water in the border lakes Ohrid, Prespa and Dojran, as well as in the river Vardar; welcomes the initiative of the trilateral Prespa Lake Euro-region involving the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece and Albania; calls on the government to extend the successful experience of the Ohrid waste water collector system to the other lakes in the region; furthermore, welcomes the progress achieved in the construction of a waste-water treatment plant in Gevgelia;

37. Expresses deep concern over the soil pollution in the town of Veles, which the World Health Organisation has declared a dangerous place to live; calls on the government to address this issue and take adequate measures to protect public health in this area; invites the Commission to consider whether IPA funds could be used in this particular case;

### ***Regional issues***

38. Commends the country on its continuous stabilising role in the region; whilst highlighting its participation in EU civilian and military missions, nevertheless reminds the government of its obligation to adhere to the CFSP Common Positions, especially those referring to restrictive measures, notably as regards the particular case of Zimbabwe;
39. Welcomes the recent decision taken by the authorities of Serbia and of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to abolish the need for international passports for citizens travelling between the two states, with the purpose of establishing joint control of their shared border;
40. Strongly regrets the fact that the name dispute with Greece continues to block the country's road to EU accession, and recalls its recommendation to the Council to start the accession negotiations immediately; underlines the importance of good neighbourly relations and of understanding the sensitivities of neighbouring countries in this process; calls on the governments concerned to avoid gestures, controversial actions and statements which could have negative effects and could strain good neighbourly relations; notes the intensified dialogue between the two Prime Ministers and encourages them to show political wisdom and a willingness to compromise and to swiftly find a solution satisfactory to both sides;
41. Recalls that, in accordance with the General Affairs Council conclusions of 14 December 2010, maintaining good neighbourly relations, including a negotiated and mutually accepted solution to the name issue, under the auspices of the UN, is essential;
42. Calls upon the Commission and the Council to start developing a generally applicable arbitration mechanism aimed at solving bilateral issues between enlargement countries, between Member States and enlargement countries and between Member States;
43. Notes with concern the use of historical arguments in the current debate, including the phenomenon of so-called 'antiquisation', which threatens to increase tensions with neighbour countries and create new internal divisions;
44. Invites the High Representative and the Commissioner responsible for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy to facilitate an agreement on the name issue and offer political guidance, with full respect for the ongoing process of negotiations and the provisions of the UN Charter; considers that finding a mutually acceptable solution as quickly as possible is a test case for the post-Lisbon common foreign policy, and for the Union's ability to solve long-standing international controversies on its borders;
45. Calls on the Council and the Commission to honour their commitments towards third countries and reward the progress and reform efforts of the countries that meet the requirements of the Union; notes that, otherwise, these countries' readiness to reform may decrease;
46. Takes the view that a further prolongation of the status quo regarding the name issue and other open questions with the neighbouring countries could undermine not only the stability

of the country and region but also the credibility of the enlargement policy, and therefore calls upon all the parties concerned to show goodwill, solidarity and responsibility in resolving the outstanding issues; in this regard calls on the authorities in the country to advance the initiative of establishing joint expert committees on history and education with Bulgaria and Greece;

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47. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the government and parliament of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.