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DRAFT REPORT

on the 2018 Commission Report on the former Yugoslav Republic of
Macedonia
(2018/2145(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

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The European Parliament,

- having regard to the European Council’s decision of 16 December 2005 to grant the country the status of candidate for EU membership,
- having regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, of the other part,
- having regard to the Framework Agreement concluded at Ohrid and signed at Skopje on 13 August 2001 (Ohrid Framework Agreement, ‘the OFA’),
- having regard to the Commission’s June 2015 Urgent Reform Priorities for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,
- having regard to the political agreement (the so-called ‘Pržino Agreement’) reached between the four main political parties in Skopje on 2 June and 15 July 2015, and the four-party agreement on its implementation of 20 July and 31 August 2016,
- having regard to the Recommendations of the Senior Experts’ Group on Systematic Rule of Law Issues of 14 September 2017,
- having regard to the Berlin Process launched on 28 August 2014,
- having regard to the final reports of the OSCE/ODIHR concerning the early parliamentary elections of 11 December 2016, which were also observed by the European Parliament, and the municipal elections of 15 October and 29 October 2017,
- having regard to the declaration of the EU-Western Balkans summit of 17 May 2018 and its Sofia Priority Agenda,
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 28 June 2018, endorsing the conclusions on enlargement and the stabilisation and association process adopted by the Council on 26 June 2018,
- having regard to the decision of the Heads of State and Government of the NATO meeting of 11-12 July 2018,
- having regard to the 14th meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Council between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the EU on 13 July 2018,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 6 February 2018 entitled ‘A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans’ (COM(2018)0065),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 17 April 2018 entitled ‘2018

Communication on EU Enlargement Policy' (COM(2018)0450), accompanied by the Commission staff working document entitled 'The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2018 Report' (SWD(2018)0154), recommending opening accession negotiations in light of the progress achieved and in view of the sustained commitment to reforms,

- having regard to the Commission staff working document on its assessment of the Economic Reform Programme of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (SWD(2018)0134) and the Joint Conclusions of the Economic and Financial Dialogue between the EU and the Western Balkans and Turkey of 25 May 2018,
 - having regard to the recommendations adopted at the 14th meeting of the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), held in Strasbourg on 7-8 February 2018,
 - having regard to the 'Jean Monnet Dialogue' process with the parliamentary leadership and political parties in the Assembly (Sobranie), launched in Ohrid on 17-18 May 2018,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on the country,
 - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A8-0000/2018),
- A. whereas by implementing robust and inclusive democratic reforms and actively improving neighbourly relations, the new government is demonstrating a serious commitment to the country's Euro-Atlantic path; whereas reform efforts should be paired with continued EU support for implementation of the Urgent Reform Priorities;
- B. whereas the agreement of 12 June 2018 on the settlement of differences and the establishment of a strategic partnership between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece sends a much-needed positive signal for stability and reconciliation in the whole Western Balkans region;
- C. whereas all political parties and state institutions have a duty to contribute to a more inclusive and open political atmosphere, enabling further progress in the EU accession process;
- D. whereas the country must further strengthen, inter alia, parliamentary legislative and oversight capacity, the judiciary, respect for the rule of law, media freedom and the fight against organised crime and corruption; whereas sustained reform efforts are needed in the areas of public administration, the economy and employment, and a comprehensive review of the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) is also required;
- E. whereas on 28 June 2018 the European Council endorsed the 26 June 2018 Council Conclusions, setting out the path towards opening accession negotiations in June 2019;
- F. whereas each candidate country is judged individually on its own merits, and it is the speed and quality of reforms that determine the timetable for accession and the pace of

negotiations;

Overall reforms and good neighbourly relations

1. Acknowledges the government's strong political resolve to fully implement the Pržino Agreement and the Urgent Reform Priorities, leading to intensified efforts on EU-related reforms, based on cross-party and inter-ethnic cooperation and consultations with civil society;
2. Commends the positive diplomacy and active trust-building efforts leading to compromise and to the settlement of open bilateral issues; welcomes the entry into force on 14 February 2018 of the friendship treaty with Bulgaria;
3. Welcomes the ratification by the Parliament of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia of the strategic partnership agreement with Greece on 20 June 2018; urges the parties to duly inform their citizens of the contents and implications of the agreement and to diligently complete all internal procedures for the ratification and implementation of this strategically important agreement, bringing an end to a protracted geopolitical limbo;
4. Recalls that the country has already achieved a high level of alignment with the acquis; welcomes its continued alignment with EU declarations and Council decisions on the Common Foreign and Security Policy and notes that full alignment is a prerequisite for the Euro-Atlantic future of the country;
5. Condemns in the strongest possible terms the 27 April 2017 attack on the Parliament of the country, during which several MPs sustained severe injuries, and calls for the organisers and perpetrators to be brought to justice; further condemns any form of obstruction and abuse of procedures of the Parliament;
6. Fully endorses the Commission's recommendation and ensuing Council decision setting June 2019 as a date for opening accession negotiations in recognition of the encouraging reform efforts; considers that a swift opening of the screening process and accession talks will sustain and deepen the reform momentum; considers that the opening of negotiations would provide further incentives for democratisation and enhance scrutiny and accountability;

Democratisation

7. Welcomes the steps taken towards reinstating checks and balances and increasing inclusion through measures improving the environment in which independent oversight institutions, the media and civil society organisations operate;
8. Appreciates the government's efforts to prevent backsliding and eliminate the remaining elements of state capture; recalls that the country was a frontrunner in the accession process in the 2000s;
9. Welcomes improvements in electoral legislation and stresses the need for a timely review of the Electoral Code by comprehensively addressing the remaining OSCE/ODIHR and GRECO recommendations on campaign financing and on political

- parties; urges political parties to democratise their internal decision-making processes;
10. Welcomes the resumption of the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee meetings and encourages continued constructive work within this interparliamentary framework;
 11. Welcomes the launch of the Jean Monnet Dialogue process in Ohrid on 17 and 18 May 2018 and the resulting adoption by unanimous cross-party support of the Code of Ethics; encourages the Working Group on Reforms and Functioning of the Sobranie to review the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament and put forward proposals for amendments and timelines for adoption in the priority areas outlined in the conclusions in Ohrid;
 12. Recommends that the country's Parliament make full use of its oversight and legislative functions and strictly limit the use of urgency procedures;
 13. Calls for sustained efforts in increasing transparency, accountability and inclusiveness of the decision-making process and improving interinstitutional coordination;

Rule of law

14. Welcomes the judicial reform strategy aimed at restoring judicial independence and ending political interference and selective justice, and stresses the need to complete legislative alignment in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission;
15. Remains concerned by widespread corruption and welcomes initial achievements in the prevention and prosecution thereof; calls for sustained efforts to establish a track record of convictions in cases of high-level corruption and organised crime; commends the work carried out by the Special Prosecutor's Office (SPO) in difficult circumstances;
16. Calls upon the authorities to intensify the fight against money laundering and conflicts of interest by establishing and strengthening the capacities of anti-corruption, counter-crime and financial investigation cells, and through freezing, confiscation and recovery of assets; welcomes the adoption of the law on the protection of whistle-blowers and calls for an urgent review of laws on anti-corruption, financial control and public procurement;
17. Calls for political and legal accountability for criminal offences to be strictly ensured, including for offences arising from the wiretap scandal; urges the Parliament to complete the reform of intelligence services, ensuring proper external oversight of security and intelligence agencies;
18. Urges the authorities to take decisive action to dismantle criminal networks engaged in human, arms and drug trafficking, and to increase both the institutional capacity and the number of investigations, prosecutions and final convictions;
19. Calls for further improvements in the asylum system and migration management; encourages the country to step up regional cooperation and partnership with Frontex under a new status agreement with a view to dismantling human trafficking networks;

Fundamental rights and civil society

20. Welcomes measures to improve inter-ethnic trust and calls for an inclusive and transparent review of outstanding aspects of the implementation of the OFA; considers it essential to ensure a full affirmation of ethnic minorities in public life;
21. Notes that the adoption of the law on the use of languages constitutes an important achievement and regrets the disruptive tactics aimed at undermining its adoption in full compliance with standard procedures;
22. Welcomes the country's ratification on 23 March 2018 of the Istanbul Convention and urges it to complete legal reforms for tackling discrimination and violence against women and girls and to continue eradicating domestic and gender-based violence, which are still widespread;
23. Underlines the need to ensure autonomy and adequate human and financial resources for independent oversight bodies; commends the role of the Ombudsman's Office in enforcing human rights and underlines the need to ensure a systemic follow-up of the Ombudsman's decisions;
24. Welcomes the initial steps taken in enhancing the prevention of discrimination and urges the authorities to effectively address hate crime and hate speech against minorities, including the Roma and the LGBTI community; deplores persistent deficiencies in the work of the Commission for Protection from Discrimination;
25. Welcomes the substantial improvement in the operational environment for, and the consultations with, civil society organisations (CSOs) and stresses the need to enhance the legal, financial and policy framework, including through laws on foundations and donations;

Media

26. Notes modest improvements in the media environment and conditions for independent reporting; calls for initiatives to create a climate that is favourable to investigative journalism; welcomes the termination of state-sponsored advertising in the media as an important measure to foster a level playing field in the sector and calls for further safeguards against politicisation of the media; stresses the need to strengthen the independence and capacity of the media regulator and the public service broadcaster; calls for measures to increase the protection of the labour and social rights of journalists;
27. Welcomes improvements in ensuring access to information; stresses the need to update regulations on media services and access to public information; stresses the need to effectively follow up on threats and intimidation against journalists; condemns any form of hate speech, inflammatory language and populist rhetoric;

Economy

28. Stresses the need to improve the business environment by ensuring fiscal consolidation and regulatory transparency and reliability, while addressing remaining rule-of-law

deficiencies, cumbersome regulatory procedures and arbitrary inspections;

29. Urges the authorities to address the large informal economy and the persistent problems of tax evasion and weak contract enforcement which continue to deter foreign direct investment; stresses the need to implement measures on public procurement and internal financial control; notes the need to improve transparency of data on public spending, procurement, State aid and the use of EU funds;
30. Underlines the importance of conducting a long-overdue population census to obtain an updated and realistic picture of the country's demographics;
31. Calls upon the authorities to focus on energy market reforms, while ensuring security of supply and diversification of energy sources;
32. Welcomes the country's commitment to connectivity projects carried out in the framework of the Berlin Process; notes the need to diversify from road transport through the implementation of rail reform measures;
33. Calls for further trade and customs facilitation and diversification of exports, including by using the intra-regional trade potential;
34. Draws attention to extreme air pollution indicators in Skopje and other heavily polluted cities; calls for effective action for air quality monitoring and improvement;

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35. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Government and Parliament of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.