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*Delegation to the EU-North Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee*

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**D-MK\_PV(2021)1207\_0**

## **MINUTES**

of the meeting of 7 December 2021, 15.30-16.30  
Brussels, remote via Webex

The meeting opened at 15.30 on Tuesday, 7 December 2022, with Andreas Schieder (Chair) presiding.

### **1. Adoption of draft agenda**

The Agenda was adopted without any changes.

### **2. Adoption of the draft minutes of the Delegation meeting of 15 March 2021 and of the EU-North Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee meeting of 25 March 2021**

The draft minutes were adopted as in the draft.

### **3. Exchange of views on the political, economic and pandemic situation in the Republic of North Macedonia, and its relations with the European Union, with Ambassador Agneza RUSI POPOVSKA, Mission of the Republic of North Macedonia to the EU; Mr Alberto CAMMARATA, Deputy Head of Unit for North Macedonia, Albania, DG NEAR, European Commission; Ms Elsa FENET, Head of Division ‘South East Europe & Western Balkans’ in the European External Action Service.**

#### **Chair's announcements**

In his opening statement, D-MK Chair Mr Andreas SCHIEDER (S&D, AT) reminded that the European Parliament's (EP) resolution adopted on 25 March 2021 welcomed North Macedonia's clear strategic orientation and commitment to EU integration, as manifested by the continued implementation of the EU-related reforms, since then also confirmed in the European Commission's report in October. He added that the EP commends the work on resolving bilateral issues with the neighbouring countries and further called on the Member States to stand by their commitments and show clear political will, enabling the Council to approve the negotiating framework and hold the first intergovernmental conference with North Macedonia as soon as possible to prevent further delays, and confirming the credibility,

objectivity and reliability of the accession process.

Mr SCHIEDER underlined that according to the latest European Commission report issued in October, North Macedonia achieved further progress, and was moderately prepared in most areas. He further warranted the support from the EP for the future reforms and the beginning of the accession negotiations with North Macedonia.

Mr SCHIEDER commended the continued positive and innovative experience the EP has built in cooperation with the Assembly of North Macedonia, and referred to the three already held successful rounds of the Jean Monnet Dialogue, and the next one planned for early 2022.

Mr SCHIEDER regretted the postponement of the 19th EU-North Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), which had been scheduled for 21-22 December in Skopje, caused by the election of the JPC co-Chair, Mr KASAMI, and the Vice Co-Chair, Mr MUCUNSKI as mayors in the recent local election, after which they had both stepped down from their duties in the Assembly.

Ambassador RUSI POPOVSKA elaborated on the local elections that took place in October and brought about a change of power on the local government level, but also triggered PM ZAEV's resignation announcement both as party leader and as PM; she further reminded that after a minor party left the ruling coalition, the opposition tried to topple the Government, but failed to secure a majority vote in the Assembly. She explained that political talks are ongoing between the Government and a smaller opposition party set to join the ruling majority, thus enlarging it and assuring political stability in the Assembly. According to Ambassador RUSI POPOVSKA, the real reason for the creation of a new ruling coalition and the preservation of political stability was the prospect to start the accession talks before the end of the year. She also pointed out that the first census in 20 years was completed, and that the results would be published in March 2022.

Ambassador RUSI POPOVSKA recognised the strong and unwavering support of the EP for North Macedonia's future in the European Union, and recalled the different forms of ongoing cooperation such as JPCs, the Jean Monnet Dialogue, as well as the informal exchanges between members of the Assembly and the European Parliament. Ambassador RUSI POPOVSKA further argued that the EU-related reforms are advancing at a steady pace, with great focus on fundamentals, rule of law, fight against corruption and organized crime. When asked by Mr SCHIEDER about the public support for EU accession, she confirmed that opinion polls show that support remains traditionally high in North Macedonia, but underlined that while it was usually between 70 % and 80 %, it has dropped by 10-15 % over the last two years, since Bulgaria had been blocking the accession talks.

Elaborating further on the relations between North Macedonia and Bulgaria, Ambassador RUSI POPOVSKA lamented the Bulgarian blockade of the accession negotiations with North Macedonia and warned of the negative effects that are spreading across the region, damaging EU's credibility and influence in the Western Balkans. She stressed that both North Macedonia and Bulgaria have the responsibility to urgently find a formula to unblock the accession talks, considering that Albania is negatively affected as well. She commended the proposals of the European Council's German, Portuguese and Slovenian Presidencies based on the best international and European standards and pointed out North Macedonia's ambitious action plan that in turn calls for compliance and political will from Bulgaria's new Government.

She commended Commissioner VARHELYI's efforts to reach an agreement between Bulgaria and North Macedonia and the swift action taken by EEAS to operationalise the commitments made at Brdo. Commenting a dissonant view expressed by Mr DZHAMBASZKI (ECR, BG), who claimed that Bulgaria is not blocking the negotiations but rather expects North Macedonia to show positive steps on bilateral issues, she reminded of the March 2020 Council decision when the leaders of all Member States, Bulgaria included, decided unanimously to open the negotiation talks with North Macedonia without any conditionality. In conclusion, the Ambassador stressed that starting the accession negotiations with both North Macedonia and Albania is a matter of political urgency for the whole region, stakes being especially high in multi-ethnic societies.

Presenting the economic situation, Ambassador RUSI POPOVSKA pointed out that North Macedonia's economic investment plan for 2021 encompassed several investment projects such as the construction of a railway to Bulgaria, the construction of wind-powered and photovoltaic parks, solar plants, gas connection with Serbia, and commitment to abandon coal energy production by 2030. She further expressed her hope that the Western Balkans would soon be integrated in the EU's roaming system.

Mr CAMMARATA recalled that North Macedonia continues to fulfil the conditions to open the accession negotiations as the European Commission's enlargement package confirmed in October. The Commission looks forward to the holding of the first Intergovernmental Conference as soon as possible. North Macedonia has maintained a steady and determined pace in advancing EU-related reforms, delivering further tangible results in the area of fundamentals, including through the 'Europe at Home' agenda and the 'Action Plan 21' on the fight against corruption. He referred to the progress of the judiciary-related reforms and the efforts made in consolidating the fight against corruption and organised crime, including for high-level cases. Mr CAMMARATA referred to the assessment of the local elections by OSCE/ODIHR and invited the authorities of North Macedonia to continue to address the remaining recommendations of OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission in a timely and inclusive manner.

Mr CAMMARATA outlined the importance to increase efforts in the areas covered by the Economic and Investment Plan and speed up the implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. He encouraged the creation of a common regional market.

Mr CAMMARATA reminded that the country was seriously hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and the economy slipped into recession in 2020, but started recovering since spring 2021, thanks to a strong fiscal response from the Government. He reminded that the EU provided North Macedonia with EUR 66 million of non-repayable financial aid for immediate needs, emergency medical equipment and socio-economic response to the pandemic, and EUR 160 million of macro-financial assistance. The EU has also supported the vaccination campaign in the country.

Mr CAMMARATA underlined the importance of good neighbourly relations. He stressed that pending bilateral issues between Bulgaria and North Macedonia need to be resolved as a matter of priority. Existing bilateral agreements, including the Prespa Agreement with Greece and of the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation with Bulgaria, need to be implemented in good faith by all parties.

When asked by Mr REUTEN (S&D, NL) what role would the Commission play to convince member states to find an agreement and start accession talks with North Macedonia, Mr

CAMMARATA assured that both the European Commission President, Ms VON DER LEYEN, and Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, Mr VÁRHELYI, would continue their strong engagement and support the future Presidency to officially start the negotiations with both North Macedonia and Albania.

Ms FENET underlined that President VON DER LEYEN's recent visit to the region, as well as the Brdo Summit and the visit of the High Representative, Mr BORRELL, who engaged with PM ZAEV, all underlined the importance of the EU enlargement process.

Ms FENET welcomed the fact that after 20 years from the Ohrid Agreement, North Macedonia successfully maintained an inclusive functioning political society.

Ms FENET pointed out that although official accession negotiations had not yet started, the present efforts had been already producing results, such as the recognition of the Macedonian COVID-19 digital certificates across the EU.

Ms FENET commended North Macedonia's 96 % alignment with the Union's foreign policy and its participation in EU CSDP missions, which signalled great commitment to cooperation. She welcomed North Macedonia's contribution in the Foreign Affairs Council and its proposal for more informal engagement on the protection of cyber space, counterterrorism and tackling disinformation in the region. She welcomed North Macedonia's constructive role in the region, in the creation of a common regional market and the implementation of the Berlin process.

#### **4. Any other business**

No further issues were raised.

#### **5. Date and place of the next meeting**

D-MK Chair Mr Andreas SCHIEDER informed the Members that the date of the next Delegation meeting was still unknown, waiting for the next D-MK Joint Parliamentary Committee meeting to be scheduled first.

The meeting closed at 16.30.

**ПРИСЪСТВЕН ЛИСТ/LISTA DE ASISTENCIA/PREZENČNÍ LISTINA/DELTAGERLISTE/  
 ANWESENHEITSLISTE/KOHALOLIJATE NIMEKIRI/KATAΣΤΑΣΗ ΠΑΡΟΝΤΩΝ/RECORD OF ATTENDANCE/  
 LISTE DE PRÉSENCE/POPIS NAZOČNIH/ELENCO DI PRESENZA/APMEKLĒJUMU REĢISTRS/DALYVIŲ SĀRAŠAS/  
 JELENLÉTI ÍV/REGISTRU TA' ATTENDENZA/PRESENTIELIJST/LISTA OBECNOŚCI/LISTA DE PRESENÇAS/  
 LISTA DE PREZENTĀ/PREZENČNÁ LISTINA/SEZNAM NAVZOČIH/LÄSNÄOLOLISTA/DELTAGARLISTA**

Бюро/Mesa/Předsednictvo/Formandskabet/Vorstand/Juhatus/Προεδρείο/Bureau/Predsjedništvo/Ufficio di presidenza/Prezidijs/Biuras/Elnökség/Prezydium/Birou/Predsedníctvo/Predsedstvo/Puheenjohtajisto/Presidiet (*)
Andreas SCHIEDER (C), Marion WALSMANN (VC)
Членове/Diputados/Poslanci/Medlemmer/Mitglieder/Parlamendiliikmed/Μέλη/Members/Députés/Zastupnici/Deputati/Deputāti/Nariai/Képviselők/Membri/Leden/Posłowie/Deputados/Deputati/Jäsenet/Ledamöter
Angel DZHAMBАЗКИ, Thijs REUTEN, Tineke STRIK

209 (7)	
216 (3)	
56 (8) (Точка от дневния ред/Punto del orden del día/Bod pořadu jednání (OJ)/Punkt på dagsordenen/Tagesordnungspunkt/Päevakorra punkt/Hμερήσια Διάταξη Σημείο/Agenda item/Point OJ/Točka dnevnog reda/Punto all'ordine del giorno/Darba kārtības punkts/Darbotvarkēs punktas/Napirendi pont/Punt Aģenda/Agendapunt/Punkt porządku dziennego/Ponto OD/Punct de pe ordinea de zi/Bod programu schōdze/Točka UL/Esityslistan kohta/Föredragningslista punkt)	3
- Ambassador Agneza RUSI POPOVSKA, Mission of the Republic of North Macedonia to the EU	

Наблюдатели/Observadores/Pozorovatelé/Observatører/Beobachter/Vaatilejad/Παρατηρητές/Observers/Observateurs/Promatrači/  
Osservatori/Novērotāji/Stebētojai/Megfigyelők/Osservaturi/Waarnemers/Obserwatorzy/Observadores/Observatori/Pozorovatelia/  
Opazovalci/Tarkkailijat/Observatörer

По покана на председателя/Por invitación del presidente/Na pozvání předsedy/Efter indbydelse fra formanden/Auf Einladung des  
Vorsitzenden/Esimene kutsel/Με πρόσκληση του Προέδρου/At the invitation of the Chair(wo)man/Sur l'invitation du président/  
Na poziv predsjednika/Su invito del presidente/Pēc priekšsēdētāja uzaicinājuma/Pirmininkui pakvietus/Az elnök meghívására/  
Fuq stedina taé-'Chairman'/Op uitnodiging van de voorzitter/Na zaproszenie Przewodniczącego/A convite do Presidente/La invitația  
președintelui/Na pozvanie predsedu/Na povabilo predsednika/Puheenjohtajan kutsusta/På ordförandens inbjudan

Съвет/Consejo/Rada/Rådet/Rat/Nōukogu/Συμβούλιο/Council/Conseil/Vijeće/Consiglio/Padome/Taryba/Tanács/Kunsill/Raad/  
Conselho/Consiliu/Svet/Neuvosto/Rådet (\*)

Комисия/Comisión/Komise/Komissionen/Kommission/Euroopa Komisjon/Επιτροπή/Commission/Komisija/Commissione/Bizottság/  
Kummissjoni/Commissie/Komisja/Comissão/Comisie/Komisia/Komissio/Kommissionen (\*)

Alberto CAMMARATA

Европейска служба за външна дейност/Servicio Europeo de Acción Exterior/Evropská služba pro vnější činnost/  
EU-Udenrigstjenesten/Europäischer Auswärtiger Dienst/Euroopa välisteenistus/Ευρωπαϊκή Υπηρεσία Εξωτερικής Δράσης/European  
External Action service/Service européen pour l'action extérieure/Europska služba za vanjsko djelovanje/Servizio europeo per l'azione  
esterna/Eiropas Ārējās darbības dienests/Europos išorės veiksmų tarnyba/Európai Külügyi Szolgálat/Servizz Ewropew ghall-Azzjoni  
Esterna/Europese dienst voor extern optreden/Europejska Służba Działalń Zewnętrznych/Serviço Europeu para a Acção Externa/  
Serviciul european pentru acțiune externă/Európska služba pre vonkajšiu činnosť/Evropska služba za zunanje delovanje/Euroopan  
ulkosuhdehallinto/Europaiska avdelningen för yttrre åtgärd (\*)

Elsa FENET

Други институции/Otras instituciones/Ostatní orgány a instituce/Andre institutioner/Andere Organe/Muud institutsioonid/  
Άλλα θεσμικά όργανα/Other institutions/Autres institutions/Druge institucije/Altre istituzioni/Citas iestādes/Kitos institucijos/  
Más intézmények/Istituzzjonijiet oħra/Andere instellingen/Inne instytucje/Outras Instituições/Alte instituições/Iné inštitúcie/Muut  
toimielimet/Andra institutioner/organ

Mission of North Macedonia

Други участници/Otros participantes/Ostatní účastníci/Endvidere deltog/Andere Teilnehmer/Muud osalejad/Επίσης Παρόντες/Other participants/Autres participants/Drugi sudionici/Altri partecipanti/Citi klátesošie/Kiti dalyviai/Más résztvevők/Parteícipanti ohra/Andere aanwezigen/Inni uczestnicy/Outros participantes/Altí participanți/Iní účastníci/Drugi udeleženci/Muut osallistujat/Övriga deltagare

Секретариат на политическите групи/Secretaría de los Grupos políticos/Sekretariát politických skupin/Gruppernes sekretariat/Sekretariat der Fraktionen/Fraktsioonide sekretariaat/Γραμματεία των Πολιτικών Ομάδων/Secretariats of political groups/Secrétaire des groupes politiques/Tajništvo klubova zastupnika/Segreteria gruppi politici/Politisko grupu sekretariáts/Frakcijų sekretoriai/Képviselőcsoportok titkársága/Segretariat gruppi političi/Fractiesecretariaten/Sekretariat Grup Politycznych/Secr. dos grupos políticos/Secretariate grupuri politice/Sekretariát politických skupín/Sekretariat političnih skupin/Poliittisten ryhmien sihteeristöt/Gruppernas sekretariat	
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Кабинет на председателя/Gabinete del Presidente/Kancelář předsedy/Formandens Kabinet/Kabinett des Präsidenten/Presidendi kantselei/Γραφείο Προέδρου/President's Office/Cabinet du Président/Ured predsjednika/Gabinetto del Presidente/Priekšsēdētāja kabinets/Pirmininko kabinetas/Elnöki hivatal/Kabinet tal-President/Kabinet van de Voorzitter/Gabinet Przewodniczącego/Gabinete do Presidente/Cabinet Președinte/Kancelária predsedu/Urad predsednika/Puhemiehen kabinetti/Talmannens kansli

Кабинет на генералния секретар/Gabinete del Secretario General/Kancelář generálního tajemníka/Generalsekretärens Kabinet/Kabinett des Generalsekretärs/Peasekretäribüro/Γραφείο Γενικού Γραμματέα/Secretary-General's Office/Cabinet du Secrétaire général/Ured glavnog tajnika/Gabinetto del Segretario generale/Generalsekretära kabinets/Generalinio sekretoriaus kabinetas/Főtitkári hivatal/Kabinet tas-Segretarju Ĝeneral/Kabinet van de secretaris-generaal/Gabinet Sekretarza Generalnego/Gabinete do Secretário-Geral/Cabinet Secretar General/Kancelária generálneho tajomníka/Urad generalnegra sekretarja/Pääsihteerin kabinetti/Generalsekreterarens kansli

Генерална дирекция/Dirección General/Generální ředitelství/Generaldirektorat/Generaldirektion/Peadirektoraat/Γενική Διεύθυνση/ Directorate-General/Direction générale/Glavna uprava/Direzione generale/Generaldirektorāts/Generalinis direktoratas/Főigazgatóság/ Direttorato Generali/Directoraten-generaal/Dyrekcja Generalna/Direcção-Geral/Direcții Generale/Generálne riaditeľstvo/Generalni direktorat/Pääsasto/Generaldirektorat	
DG PRES	
DG IPOL	
DG EXPO	
DG EPRS	
DG COMM	
DG PERS	
DG INLO	
DG TRAD	
DG LINC	
DG FINS	
DG ITEC	
DG SAFE	
Правна служба/Servicio Jurídico/Právní služba/Juridisk Tjeneste/Juristischer Dienst/Öigusteenistus/Νομική Υπηρεσία/Legal Service/ Service juridique/Pravna služba/Servizio giuridico/Juridiskais dienests/Teisés tárnyba/Jogi szolgálat/Servizz legali/Juridische Dienst/ Wydział prawnego/Serviço Jurídico/Serviciu Juridic/Právny servis/Oikeudellinen yksikkö/Rättsstjänsten	
Секретариат на комисията/Secretaría de la comisión/Sekretariát výboru/Udvalgssekretariatet/Ausschussekretariat/Komisjoni sekretariaat/Γραμματεία επιτροπής/Committee secretariat/Secrétaire de la commission/Tajništvo odbora/Segreteria della commissione/ Komitejas sekretariāts/Komiteto sekretoriatas/A bizottság titkársága/Segretarjat tal-kumitat/Commissie secretariaat/Sekretariat komisji/ Secretariado da comissão/Secretariat comisie/Sekretariat odbora/Valiokunnan sihteeristö/Utskottsekretariatet	
Igor Miskulin, Tatiana Mrazikova, Peter Lang	
Сътрудник/Asistente/Asistent/Assistent/Assistenz/Βοηθός/Assistant/Assistente/Palīgs/Padējējas/Asszisztens/Asystent/Pomočník/ Avustaja/Assisterter	
Vesselina Veleva	

- \* (P) = Председател/Presidente/Předseda/Formand/Vorsitzender/Esimees/Πρόεδρος/Chair(wo)man/Président/Predsjednik/Priekšsēdētājs/  
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Vice-Chair(wo)man/Potpredsjednik/Vice-Präsident/Potpredsjednik/Priekšsēdētāja vietnieks/Pirmininko pavaduotojas/Alelnök/  
Viči 'Chairman'/Ondervoorzitter/Wiceprzewodniczący/Vice-Präsident/Vicepreședinte/Podpredseda/Podpredsednik/  
Varapuheenjohtaja/Vice ordförande  
(M) = Член/Miembro/Clen/Medlem/Mitglied/Parlamentiliige/Méλος/Member/Membre/Član/Membro/Deputāts/Narys/Képviselő/  
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