



Delegation to the EU-North Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee

D-MK_PV(2022)0505

MINUTES of the meeting of 5 May 2022, 9.00-10.30 Strasbourg

The meeting opened at 9.15 on Thursday, 5 May 2022, with Andreas Schieder (Chair) presiding.

1. Adoption of the draft agenda

The Agenda was adopted without any changes as in the draft.

2. Adoption of the minutes of the Delegation meeting of 7 December 2021

The draft minutes from the delegation meeting of 30 September 2021 were adopted as in the draft.

Chair's Announcements

In his introduction of the meeting, **Mr Andreas SCHIEDER**, D-MK Chair, announced that the 19th EU-North Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee meeting scheduled initially for 26-27 May in Skopje was to be postponed due to the inability of Members from several groups to travel to North Macedonia at the end of May. He explained that the request for mission authorization that had been submitted to the Conference of Presidents was therefore withdrawn and that the decision was taken in consultation with the Assembly of North Macedonia. He explained that the EP has an intention to hold the 19th JPC in Skopje, as soon as possible. Further, he underlined North Macedonia's clear strategic orientation and commitment to EU integration and recognized the work done by the country so far to progress in terms of EU criteria. He also commended the work on trying to resolve the bilateral issues with neighbouring countries.

Mr Schieder also recalled the EP's request for the Council to approve the negotiating framework and hold the first intergovernmental conference with North Macedonia as soon as possible to prevent further delays, confirming the credibility, objectivity, and reliability of the accession process. He concluded his opening remarks by thanking all participants for taking part in the meeting and said he was looking forward to their comments.

3. Exchange of views on the political and economic situation in the Republic of North Macedonia, and its relations with the European Union

Ambassador Agneza RUSI POPOVSKA, Mission of the Republic of North Macedonia to the EU, started her address by thanking the EP for the fruitful cooperation and for supporting North Macedonia's path to European integration. She stated that her intervention would be more personal since this was her last meeting in the capacity of ambassador.

She proceeded to say that the situation in which North Macedonia and Europe were facing following the Russian aggression, was extraordinary. According to her, North Macedonia had shown once again that it was a trusted and reliable partner aligning with all EU sanctions on Russia and implementing them immediately, as well as by offering humanitarian aid to Ukraine. She further emphasized the fact that **the stall in EU integration of North Macedonia was a source of vulnerability** against the war background because it had a direct impact on the level of trust of the population towards the EU. She stated that "in these times, the EU's hesitation towards us is a luxury we cannot afford." She also explained that the government of North Macedonia was pursuing a political dialogue with Bulgaria and that she remained hopeful in terms of finding common ground. She firmly stated that they strongly believed that there was no time to lose and that all parts had to do their fair share towards progress.

Moreover, **Ambassador Rusi Popovska** commented on the main moves of the Kovacevski Government, in office since mid-January. She explained that the new government had been dealing with multiple crises simultaneously, yet delivering in key areas. She spoke of the package of measures valued at 3.3 % of the projected GDP and aimed at protecting households from rising food and energy prices. She noted that the government's plan was to invest in projects that support energy and that she was thankful that crucial projects submitted by North Macedonia to the Commission had been approved. She also referred to the possible EU microfinancing assistance package and an arrangement with the IMF to mitigate the negative impact on Macedonian households and companies. She further expressed her gratitude towards EP's support, especially in the field of digitalization.

Ambassador Rusi Popovska expressed gratitude for including the Western Balkans in the work of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Finally, she informed Members that she would be leaving her post at the Mission of North Macedonia to the EU soon.

Ms Michela MATUELLA, Head of Unit for Albania, North Macedonia, and Acting Director for Western Balkans in DG NEAR, European Commission, continued the discussion by stating that the meeting was taking place at an important moment and that the war in Ukraine had prompted EU's actions. She reassured that the Commission sees the Western Balkans as a geopolitically important region and that the Commission therefore pushed for starting the negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia as soon as possible. She continued by saying that North Macedonia had demonstrated its commitment and determination on its EU path, had fully aligned with the sanctions on Russia and had welcomed Ukrainian refugees. **Ms Matuella** said that it is also important for the government and the opposition to cooperate to further EU integration.

She also specified that the Commission saw success in the educational reform, the new judicial reform, and the fight against corruption and organized crime in North Macedonia. She mentioned that the state commission for fight against corruption was up and running and that it was a tangible result of positive progress. In terms of economic reforms, she stated that they continue and that the first package and the new IPA III would strengthen the economic reforms even more. Moreover, she emphasized the importance of a regional market, the advancement of the green agenda, as well as good neighbourly relations as key areas for the EU integration process. In conclusion, **Ms Matuella** stated that North Macedonia had fulfilled its tasks and that the EU had to act as soon as possible.

Ms Elsa FENET, Head of Division 'Western Balkans', European External Action Service, also PE698.394v01-00

highlighted North Macedonia's full alignment with the EU foreign policy, notably in recent months, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. She commended the move and acknowledged that it came with a price, which the EU would try to help mitigate. She underlined that the war in Ukraine was exposing the existing weaknesses of countries in the region, including its dependence on Russian fossil fuels. She recognised North Macedonia's participation in CFSP missions. She welcomed the improvement of the country's ranking in terms of media freedom. She also pointed out the significance of the fact the 27 EU foreign ministers would hold an informal meeting with the six Western Balkan foreign ministers. **Ms Fenet** underlined it would be best to hold the IGCs with Albania and North Macedonia as soon as possible.

Ms. Matuella also explained that the Commission **was** mapping several economic and regional packages which could help to figure out the challenges that the recent sanctions might cause to country's economy. She mentioned that micro-financial assistance could offer a structured approach to fight economic decline. She stated that the recent COVID-19 crisis could be a good model of how the Commission could support Western Balkan countries.

In the meeting, **Mr Schieder** also referred to the positive and innovative experience built in cooperation with the Sobranie through the continuing Jean Monnet Dialogue (JMD), launched during the previous legislature. He stated that the process was kept alive during the difficult pandemic years, with several online meetings, followed by a mission to Skopje in September 2021. He underlined that improving the parliamentary rules and procedures is an ongoing process and commended the political commitment across the Sobranie to constructively engage in the JMD and expressed his hope that the agreements reached during the 3rd round of Dialogue would be implemented to enable the next round of Dialogue and raised the possibility of a 'retreat' of the Working Group to finalise the work on the Rules of Procedure.

4. Draft agenda and draft programme of the 19th JPC

The draft agenda and draft programme of the 19th JPC were to be announced at a later stage, following an agreement on a June visit to Skopje.

5. Any other business

No further questions / business was raised after the discussion.

6. Date and place of the next meeting

The date and place of the next meeting in Skopje, North Macedonia, likely taking place in June, was to be announced shortly.

The meeting closed at 10.30.

**ПРИСЪСТВЕН ЛИСТ/LISTA DE ASISTENCIA/PREZENČNÍ LISTINA/DELTAGERLISTE/
 ANWESENHEITSLISTE/KOHALOLIJATE NIMEKIRI/KATASTAΣΗ ΠΑΡΟΝΤΩΝ/RECORD OF ATTENDANCE/
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Andreas Schieder (C), Irena Joveva (VC) (remotely), Marion Walsmann (VC)
Членове/Diputados/Poslanci/Medlemmer/Mitglieder/Parlamendiliikmed/Mέλη/Members/Députés/Zastupníci/Deputati/Deputāti/Nariai/Képviselők/Membri/Leden/Posłowie/Deputados/Deputati/Jäsenet/Ledamöter
Massimo Casanova
Заместници/Suplentes/Náhradníci/Stedførtrædere/Stellvertreter/As endusliikmed/Avalņoportēc/Substitutes/Suppléants/Zamjenici/Supplenti/Aizstājēji/Pavaduojantysnariai/Póttagok/Sostituti/Plaatsvervangers/Zastępcy/Membros suplementos/Supleanți/Náhradníci/Namestniki/Varajäsenet/Suppleanter

209 (7)	
216 (3)	
56 (8) (Точка от дневния ред/Punto del orden del día/Bod pořadu jednání (OJ)/Punkt på dagsordnen/Tagesordnungspunkt/Päevakorra punkt/Ημερήσια Διάταξη Σημείο/Agenda item/Point OJ/Tocka dnevnog reda/Punto all'ordine del giorno/Darba kārtības punkts/Darbotvarķes punktas/Napirendi pont/Punt Agenda/Agendapunkt/Punkt porządku dziennego/Ponto OD/Punct de pe ordinea de zi/Bod programu schôdze/Tocka UL/Esityslistan kohta/Föredragningslista punkt)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ambassador Agneza RUSI POPOVSKA, Mission of the Republic of North Macedonia to the EU - Ms Michela Matuella, Head of Unit for Albania and North Macedonia, DG NEAR, European Commission - Ms Elsa FENET, Head of Division 'Western Balkans', European External Action Service 	3

Наблюдатели/Observadores/Pozorovatelé/Observatører/Beobachter/Vaatlejad/Παρατηρητές/Observers/Observateurs/Promatrači/Osservatori/Nověrotáji/Stebětajai/Megfigyelők/Osservaturi/Waarnemers/Obserwatorzy/Observadores/Observatori/Pozorovatelia/Opozovalci/Tarkkailijat/Observatörer

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Más intézmények/Istítúzjoni jiet oħra/Andere instellingen/Inne instytucje/Outras Instituições/Alte instituições/Iné inštitúcie/Muut
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Igor Miskulin, Adam Isaacs, Andre De Munter

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Avustaja/Assisterer

Vesselina Veleva

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