

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

13th Meeting

3-4 December 2015

Skopje

Recommendations

The EU - former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee held its 13th meeting in Skopje on 3-4 December 2015 under the joint Chairmanship of Mr Kenan HASIPI (Democratic Party of Turks, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and Mr Alojz PETERLE (EPP, Slovenia).

At this meeting, the Committee held an exchange of views with Mr Fatmir Besimi, Vice-President of the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in charge of EU Affairs, Mr Nikola Poposki, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Mr Aivo Orav, Ambassador, on behalf of the European External Action Service and the European Commission.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee exchanged views on the following topics:

- Relations between the European Union (EU) and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
- Implementation of the 2 June and 15 July agreements and the targets of the High Level Accession Dialogue with particular focus on:
 - Rule of Law, judiciary reform and fight against corruption;
 - Electoral reform and forthcoming parliamentary elections;
 - Freedom of media;
 - Inter-community dialogue;
- Migration crisis: challenges, management and possible consequences.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee, pursuant to Rule 3 of its Rules of Procedure, addresses the following recommendations to the institutions of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and of the European Union:

Taking into account:

- A. The European Commission Progress Report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges of 10 November 2015;

- B. Declaration and recommendations of the 11th meeting of the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia JPC of 22-23 May 2013 and Joint statement of the Co-Chairs following the 12th meeting on 26-27 November 2014 in Strasbourg;
- C. Council conclusions on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia of 16 December 2014, 21 April 2015 and 23 June 2015;
- D. European Parliament resolution of 11 March 2015 on the 2014 Progress Report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2014/2948(RSP));
- E. The twelfth meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Council between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the EU on 20 July 2015;
- F. The Fifth meeting of the High level Accession Dialogue - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the European Commission on 18 September 2015;
 - 1. Welcomes the political agreement of 2 June 2015 and its protocol of 15 July 2015 and their implementation, especially the return of the opposition to the Parliament, the appointment of the Special Prosecutor and its team and the new composition of the government; insists on the continued implementation of these agreements;
 - 2. Welcomes the Commission Progress Report of 10 November 2015 and draws attention to the Commission's statement that the accession process of the country is at a critical juncture; notes that in the light of the progress made so far in the implementation of the June/July political agreement the Commission is prepared to extend its recommendation to open accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on the condition of the continued implementation of the June/July political agreement and substantial progress in the implementation of the Urgent Reform Priorities;
 - 3. Repeats its support for the opening of accession negotiations provided that the required conditions continue to be met by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; Emphasizes the importance of the full implementation of the Urgent Reform Priorities for the recommendation to open the accession negotiations to be maintained; in this regard recommends the Council to decide on opening accession talks at its earliest convenience after the April elections, given that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia delivers on implementing the political agreement and Urgent Reform Priorities; also calls the Council to request the Commission to start preparing the negotiating framework already now;
 - 4. Welcomes the Commission's willingness to continue the High Level Accession Dialogue (HLAD) and its resumption after two years on 18 September 2015, recalling that momentum for reforms needs to be maintained and to continue with their effective implementation, as well as holding early parliamentary elections scheduled in April 2016; points out that HLAD has provided so far a useful focus on necessary reforms in the country, nevertheless recalls that HLAD cannot be a substitute for EU membership negotiations;
 - 5. Takes note of the Recommendations of the Senior Experts' Group contained in the Urgent Reform Priorities prepared by the European Commission and urges continuous cooperation between the political parties concerning the implementation of the action plan adopted by the government on the basis of these recommendations;

6. Takes into consideration the EC assessment for the judicial reform process—and calls on the authorities to ensure full independence of the judicial system and abstain from any form of political interference; calls for establishing a track record on effective prosecution in fight against corruption, especially high level; takes note of the court's high clearance rate overcoming backlogs and length of court proceedings and expects that all judicial procedures in the country are conducted in full respect of the principles of national as well as international law; appreciates that the European Court of Human Rights has confirmed that the Supreme Court provides an effective domestic remedy for length of proceedings complaints;
7. Welcomes the progress reached on the election legislation in accordance with the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations and stresses the need for its implementation addressing all shortcomings in an inclusive and timely manner; underscores the necessity to prepare the upcoming elections in April 2016 to the highest international standards as set out in the 'Urgent Reform Priorities'; calls on all political parties to ensure free and fair election procedure and to work towards a more cooperative political culture;
8. Expresses its concern over the decline of freedom of expression and media environment in the recent years; takes note of the reports of the associations of journalists regarding the increase of cases of violence against journalists in the country in 2015; strongly urges the country to address the shortcomings in terms of media freedom and ensure open, transparent and independent media reporting, without pressures threats; invites the government to redress the unequal distribution of country's advertisement funds to all media that distorts the media market;
9. Recommends further continued implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement as well as the inclusion of all communities in state institutions, in particular through a strengthened political cross-ethnic and multi-confessional dialogue; in this context, draws attention to the necessity to prepare for a census without further delay; furthermore, supports an educational system aimed at achieving a multi-ethnic society through a common shifts education, such as in Kumanovo;
10. Commends on the recent steps taken to enrich the bilateral relations with neighbouring countries in the framework of maintaining good neighbourly relations, in particular the mutual commitment by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece for preparing confidence-building measures; is hopeful that a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution of the name issue between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece may be found in the short term; reiterates its view that the name issue must not represent an obstacle to the launch of accession negotiations although it should be solved as early as possible; in this context, encourages direct talks at the highest level; takes note of the recent steps towards strengthening bilateral relations between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria and urges both countries to intensify their efforts to promote historical reconciliation; in this regard, welcomes the joint sessions of the Academies of Science and Arts of the two states;
11. Notes the unprecedented influx of refugees passing through the country and appreciates the extraordinary effort of the authorities of the country to cope with the increased migratory pressure and the assistance it provides to the persons in need of international protection and its willingness to fully assume its own responsibilities; notes that the transit of thousands of refugees is a challenge for the countries of the region in terms of expenses related to the provision of basic needs for receiving migrants; in this context,

emphasizes the need for taking concrete measures by EU Member States in sharing the responsibility, recalling the 17 Points Action Plan adopted on 25th October 2015 in Brussels;

12. Recommends continued determination in implementing measures to prevent abuse of the liberalised visa regime with the EU as well as continue addressing the socio-economic motives for such abuse; welcomes the measures taken and the government efforts to prevent asylum seekers to leave the country; in this regard, the EU needs to substantially increase support in the fields of fundamental rights and issues linked to migration; therefore calls on the Commission to start preparatory work (pre-screening) in these areas for further accession talks (Chapters 23 and 24).