

# EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

## **DELEGATION TO THE EU-THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA** **JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE**

### INFORMATION NOTE

#### ON THE WORK OF

#### **THE EU-THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE (2004-2009)**

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES OF THE UNION



---

5 October 2009/LM

## **Previous European Parliament- Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia contacts**

On 17 November 1994 the European Parliament constituted a delegation for relations with South-East Europe. The delegation was responsible for interparliamentary relations with five countries in the region: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (now Serbia-Montenegro), and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The European Parliament delegation, which met with a permanent Parliament Group for Cooperation with the European Parliament in the Assembly of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, was chaired by Ms Doris Pack (EPP-ED, Germany).

The delegation held nine interparliamentary meetings with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The first meetings (26 November 1996 in Skopje, 29-30 September 1997 in Brussels, 2-4 June 1998 in Ohrid, and 15-16 March 1999 in Brussels) mainly discussed the country's relations with its neighbours and the EU, as well as the internal political, economic and in particular inter-ethnic situation.

Given the decision of the Council of the European Union of 21 June 1999 to invite the Commission to present a formal recommendation for negotiating directives for a Stabilization and Association Agreement for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the following meetings (22 November 1999 in Skopje, 10-11 July 2000 in Ohrid and Skopje, and 22-23 January in Brussels) drew particular attention to the stabilization and association process and the process of bringing the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia more closely into line with EU structures.

In late February 2001 the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia saw the start of a wave of terrorist activity and acts of violence perpetrated by ethnic Albanians, particularly in the north of the country, in the Tetovo and Kumanovo areas. The tensions were sparked off by alleged State discrimination against ethnic Albanians in the country. The extremely serious unrest, which was aggravated by the use of firearms, continued for around six months. On 13 August, an agreement providing for an end to the violence in return for a commitment to implementing a programme of constitutional and legislative reforms was signed in Ohrid (the so called Ohrid Framework Agreement) under the auspices of the EU and the United States. The level of political tension in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia remained extremely high until the end of the year, and the European Parliament continued to monitor the situation closely and gave its full support to the internal peace-making process. The Bureau of the Delegation for relations with South-East Europe visited the country on 5-6 October in 2001 and 30th May-1st June in 2002.

The Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union was signed on 9 April 2001 and the two final meetings of the interparliamentary delegation (27-28 September 2003 in Skopje, and 20-21 January 2004 in Brussels - following the interethnic clashes of 2001 and the subsequent reconciliation process the 8th meeting was exceptionally held two years after the previous one) were largely concerned with the conclusion of the SAA, as well as the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

On 22 March 2004, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia submitted an application for EU membership to the Irish Presidency of the Council and on 1 April that same year, the SAA between the EU and its Member States and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia entered into force.

## **Joint Parliamentary Committee**

### **Functioning of the JPC**

The structured dialogue between the states holding an Association Agreement with the European Union is conducted at various levels and the Joint Parliamentary Committee is a means to promote contacts and discussions between the European Parliament and the Parliaments of the Associate States. Alongside the Association Council and the Association Committee, it thus constitutes the parliamentary body that follows the accession process on a regular basis. The EU-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee was set up in accordance with Article 114 of the Stabilization and Association Agreement, and its functioning is in practical terms identical to all the other EU JPCs.

The JPC meetings provide the members of both sides with an opportunity to learn about each other's political priorities and concerns, and to exchange views. Through the JPC, the members can further transfer messages to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia government, the Council, or the European Commission, and they can express concerns about shortcomings in the preparation of accession. Additionally, they assure - within their limits - parliamentary scrutiny with regard to the technical and political process of negotiations. At the end of each meeting, the JPC adopts recommendations, which are addressed to both Parliaments, government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Council and the Commission.

The fact that the role of the JPC was laid down in an Agreement formally agreed upon by the EU and its Member States, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, creates an obligation for the Council of Ministers, the European Commission and the government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to fully participate in its work. For instance, these institutions are obliged to report on the functioning of the Association Agreement at the beginning of each JPC meeting.

The JPC is meant to meet twice a year, once in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and once in one of the working places of the European Parliament.

### **Chairmen**

#### ***European Parliament delegation***

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| 2004 -2006 | Mr Georgios <b>Papastamkos</b> (EPP-ED, Greece)  |
| 2007-2009  | Mr. Antonios <b>Trakatellis</b> (EPP-ED, Greece) |

### ***Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia delegation***

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 2004 - 2006 | Mr Andrej <b>Zernovski</b> (Liberal Democratic Party) |
| 2006 - 2009 | Mr Aleksandar <b>Spasenovski</b> (VMRO-DPMNE)         |

### **Meetings**

So far, the EU- Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia JPC has held 6 meetings:

- |               |                               |
|---------------|-------------------------------|
| - 1st meeting | 30-31 March 2005, Skopje      |
| - 2nd meeting | 5-6 December 2005, Brussels   |
| - 3rd meeting | 29-30 January 2007, Skopje    |
| - 4th meeting | 26-27 November 2007, Brussels |
| - 5th meeting | 27-28 November 2008 Skopje    |
| - 6th meeting | 31 March 2009, Brussels       |

### **Subjects discussed**

Besides adopting the JPC's rules of procedure, the main topics of the *1st JPC meeting* was the integration of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the EU, internal political developments in the country, the process of economic reforms and regional cooperation, implementation of the SAA, implementation of EU assistance, and the liberalization of the visa regimes.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia expressed its aim to obtain the status of a candidate country by 2006, and to be ready to join by 2010. In this context, the importance of the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement was emphasized by the JPC, as was the need for the creation of a favourable business climate, reducing bureaucracy and fighting corruption.

Regarding the visa issue the JPC recognized the importance of liberalization of the visa regime for citizens of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and urged the EU to commence dialogue on this topic. It further recommended the government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to provide equal visa regimes to all EU Member Countries.

On 9 November 2005, the Commission presented its Opinion on the application from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for membership of the European Union and the *2nd JPC meeting* consequently touched upon some of the issues brought up in the report. The JPC expressed its support for granting the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia candidate status at the December EU Summit, in line with the Commission recommendation of 9 November.

Again, liberalization of the visa regime and the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement were important themes. Further, the process of economic reforms to fulfil the economic criteria for EU membership, as well as the reform process in the fields of justice, home affairs and state administration was discussed in more detail.

The JPC additionally reflected over the CARDS programme and the measures being undertaken to implement EU funds, and emphasized the role of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the stabilization and association process in the region.

- - -

In July 2006 general elections were held in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Due to preparations of these, and the setting up of a new delegation to the EU-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia JPC following the general elections, the JPC did not manage to hold any meetings during 2006.

- - -

At the *3rd JPC meeting* held on the 29-30 January 2007 in Skopje, views were exchanged about the relations of the EU and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Strategy Progress Report of the European Commission on Enlargement of 8 November 2006, and on the Progress Report on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Special attention was given to the DUI boycott of the Republic's democratic institutions, which the Commission called upon to end. Some doubt was cast about the new government's policies with implementing the Ohrid agreements, which was also discussed. Also, the Republic's relations with its neighbouring countries, specifically the Hellenic Republic, were discussed.

The internal political situation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia following the general elections in 2006 was discussed, as well as the process of economic reforms to fulfil the European criteria for EU membership. The new government's policies towards EU and NATO were brought up, with focus on the importance of continuity towards the EU objectives, as well as the situation of minorities, amongst them the Roma people. Concerning the economic reforms to fulfil the EU objectives of membership, both positive and negative assessments were given, and the decision to give the country candidate status was welcomed.

Furthermore, the main discussions concerning the process of reforms in the fields of the judiciary, home affairs and state administration circled around the noticed slow-down of the reform processes, the 'surplus requirements' in the administration and importance of strengthening the judiciary's independence.

Once again, the visa liberalization process was brought up, as well as an evaluation of the CARDS Programme for 2006 and preparation for a better use of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).

- - -

At the 4th JPC meeting in Brussels on 26-27 November 2007, under the joint Chairmanship of Mr. Antonios TRAKATELLIS (EPP-ED, Greece) and Mr. Aleksandar SPASENOVSKI (VMRO-DPMNE, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), the Committee held an exchange of views with Mr Nikola Dimitrov, Special Representative of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for EU and NATO, representing the Government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, H.E. Mr António Tânger, Ambassador, Special Envoy for the Western

Balkans, representing the EU Presidency-in-Office of the Council of the European Union and Mr Jan Truszczyński, Deputy Director General, representing the European Commission on "the EU-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia relations and on the Commission's 2007 Progress Report".

The Joint Parliamentary Committee addressed the following issues:

- ❖ The activities of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for progress towards EU membership, in the context of internal and the political progress of the country, and the regional and the European developments
- ❖ The process of economic reforms to fulfil the European criteria for EU membership;
- ❖ The reform processes in the fields of judiciary, home affairs and the state administration in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
- ❖ The facilitation of the visa regime - step towards full liberalization; and
- ❖ Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)

A lengthy debate was held on the name issue, but the JPC could not reach an agreement to include this matter in its Final Declaration which was adopted unanimously with two abstentions.

No Joint Parliamentary Meeting was held during spring 2008 due to the general elections in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The EU - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee held its 5<sup>th</sup> meeting in Skopje on 27-28 November 2008 under the joint Chairmanship of Mr. Antonios TRAKATELLIS (EPP-ED, Greece) and Mr. Aleksandar SPASENOVSKI (VMRO-DPMNE, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). At this meeting, the Committee held an exchange of views with Mr. Ivica Bocevski, Deputy - Prime Minister of the Government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia responsible for EU affairs, H.E. Mr Bernard VALERO, representing the EU Presidency-in-Office of the Council of the European Union and H.E. Mr Erwan FOUÉRÉ, EU Special Representative and Head of the EC Delegation, representing the European Commission on "the EU - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia relations and on the Commission's 2008 Progress Report".

The Joint Parliamentary Committee addressed the following issues:

- ❖ Exchange of views with the Government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on the relations between the European Union and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, on the state of implementation of the key priorities of the Accession Partnership and on the European Commission's 2008 Progress Report on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
- ❖ Liberalization of the visa regime for the citizens of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
- ❖ Environmental issues in the regional cooperation relevant for the accession process;

- ❖ Transport and infrastructures;
- ❖ Conditions in the penitentiary system;
- ❖ The EU assistance to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with a particular view to the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA);
- ❖ The TAIEX Instrument (major programmes and achievements) and the strengthening of the institutional cooperation between the two parliaments, in order to improve the parliamentary work.

- - -

The EU - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee held its 6<sup>th</sup> meeting in Brussels on 31 March 2009 under the joint Chairmanship of Mr Antonios TRAKATELLIS (EPP-ED, Greece) and Mr Aleksandar SPASENOVSKI (VMRO-DPMNE, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). The Committee held an exchange of views with Mr. Ivica BOCEVSKI, Deputy-Prime Minister of the Government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Mr Libor SEČKA, Director-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, representing the Czech Presidency-in-Office and Mr Jan TRUSZCZYNSKI, Deputy Director, representing the European Commission on the "EU - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia relations".

The Joint Parliamentary Committee addressed the following issues:

- ❖ Liberalization of the visa regime for the citizens of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
- ❖ Environmental issues
- ❖ Related educational Community programs
- ❖ Management of EU funds, with a particular view to the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)

The JPC adopted unanimously a Final Declaration welcoming the first round of the presidential and municipal elections in the Republic on 22 March, which met most of the OSCE commitments and standards for democratic elections. Furthermore, it called for visa liberalisation for the country's citizens and for abolishment of the visa requirement as soon as possible. The Committee regretted, that three years after the Republic was granted the status of candidate for EU membership, the accession negotiations have not yet started. The Committee therefore urged the Council to accelerate this process by deciding on a date for beginning of negotiations during 2009, providing the country fully implement the key priorities of the Accession Partnership.

The next JPC meeting will be held in Skopje in autumn 2009, after the European elections.