



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

MINUTES
of the 13th meeting of the
*DELEGATION TO THE
EU-FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA
JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE*
Strasbourg, 3-4 December 2015

The meeting began on 3 December, at 15:00 with the opening remarks Mr Kenan HASIPP, Co-Chair of the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee. Mr HASIPI welcomed distinguished guests Mr. Alojz PETERLE, Co-Chairs of the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee, Mr. Aivo ORAV, Ambassador, EU Delegation in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, on behalf of the European External Action Service and the European Commission and Mr. Fatmir BESIMI, Vice-President of the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in charge of EU Affairs.

In their opening speech the Chairs of the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee, Mr HASIPI and Mr PETERLE, welcomed all the members of the Committee.

1. Adoption of the draft agenda

The agenda was adopted with changes. Sub-items two and four under Implementation of the 2 June and 15 July agreements and the targets of the High Level Accession Dialogue with particular focus on, changed positions on the agenda.

2. Adoption of the minutes of the 12th meeting of the EU- former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee held on 26-27 November 2014 in Strasbourg

The minutes were adopted without amendments, as in the draft document.

3. Exchange of views with representatives of the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, of the Council of the European Union and of the European

Commission on the relations between the EU and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Mr. BESIMI, Vice-President of the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in charge of EU Affairs, stressed that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia appreciates that enlargement is still on the EU agenda. Mr. BESIMI stated that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia takes notice of the conditional recommendation for the start of accession negotiations. He noted the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has a clear road map towards its European integration. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia sees the Progress Report as correctly reflecting the situation during the crisis. Mr BESIMI informed the Committee of the implementation of the political agreement. The legislation of Special Prosecutor was adopted as well as a series of laws regulating the state election commission. Mr BESIMI informed on the meeting with civil society. He mentioned the action plan on Urgent Reforms Priorities being developed on the recommendation from the European Commission. Mr BESIMI mentioned the migration crisis and stated that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia will do its best to tackle the issue in the most human way. On the IPA Mr BESIMI stated that the country will develop a program with EU assistance to increase the capacity for IPA in order to address deficiencies. Mr BESIMI stated that the government will continue to implement the recommendations from the EU Accession plan. Mr BESIMI stated there is high level of support for EU integration in the country and appreciates the support of the EU.

Mr. Aivo ORAV, EU Ambassador, EU Delegation in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, on behalf of the European External Action Service and the European Commission, welcomed the opposition to the Committee and stated that inclusion of the opposition is part of a democracy. Mr ORAV stated that in the areas of rule of law, judicial reforms, freedom of expression and fight against corruption in Urgent Reform Priorities there is still a need of work. There needs to be shown political will for independence of the judicial institutions. Mr ORAV underlined that it is important now that the country makes progress, especially in the light of positive developments in the neighbourhood.

A short discussion followed the intervention. The debate touched upon the EU's methodology for assessing the process for accession to the EU. The timing of the new methodology was criticized. The economy of the country was mentioned as was the need for judiciary reforms. Some MPs from the Sobranie brought up the alleged unlawful search and imprisonment of Albanians.

The following members took part in the debate: HASIPI (Sobranie), IBRAIMI (Sobranie), Ms Lidija DIMOVA (Sobranie)

4. Implementation of the 2 June and 15 July agreements and the targets of the High Level Accession Dialogue with particular focus on:

The agenda item was divided into four sub-items.

Rule of Law, judiciary reform and fight against corruption

The first sub-items was the rule of law, judiciary reform and fight against corruption. The speakers were Ms PETIR and Mr HASIPI.

Mr HASIPI stated that the government is taking measure to reform the judiciary in accordance with the agreements and the High Level Accession Dialogue. He underlined that the current problem is not legislation but the implementation of the legislation. Mr HASIPI mentioned that backlogging in the courts is being dealt with. In the case of the fight against corruption, a new legislation for the protection of whistle blowers has been adopted.

Ms PETIR stated that the current political crisis in the country should not be able to take place in a democratic state. She stated that the EU must do more to help the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in overcoming its internal political problems. Ms PETIR emphasised that the new law on personal data protection is a fundamental step towards EU integration but also stated that the independence of the judiciary needs to be secured. Ms PETIR stated that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is ready to initiate negotiation talks with the EU and she urged all member countries to support the country in joining NATO.

In the following debate the issue of lack of progression in terms of judicial reforms was brought up. The need for resources allocated to the Ombudsman institution was another issue discussed. The issue of the human rights court was brought up and debated. The special prosecutor institution was brought up and some MPs from Sobranie stated that the institution was being used to harass the opposition.

Inter-community dialogue

The second sub-item was inter-community dialogue. Mr KOVATCHEV and Mr GRUBI were the speakers. Mr KOVATCHEV mentioned the review of the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

Mr KOVATCHEV emphasised that violent incidents need to be fully investigated. He emphasised the importance of letting students from different communities meet and not let separation and segregation happen. KOVATCHEV stated that it was important for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to create a common understanding of the country and regions history.

Mr GRUBI invited the EU to help the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with the Framework Agreement. He stated that the foundation of peace is inter-community relations and that dialogue between the ethnic groups are very important. Mr GRUBI stated that political effort must be given to strive for integration for all.

In the debate following, some of the speakers spoke about the discrimination against the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia citizens of Albanian ethnicity. It was brought up that the new electoral law placed provisions in order to help dialogue between the different communities. The challenges of history and education was a topic for discussion.

Freedom of Media

The third sub-item was the topic of freedom of media. The speakers were Ms DIMOVA and Ms SPYRAKI.

Ms DIMOVA stated that it was true that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had been assessed negatively in the latest report but expressed the belief that the country was fantastic in terms of adopting legislation. She stated that the problem for the country was in the implementation of the legislation. Ms DIMOVA mentioned that the public broadcasting

services need to improve. She stated that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has a problem in terms of access to information.

Mr SPYRAKI expressed deep concern over the status of freedom of media and expression in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. She mentioned that the working paper from the EC underlined the lack of transparency in the media in the country. Mr SPYRAKI mentioned a letter from the association of journalists of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia regarding threats and attacks against journalists.

In the following debate on the topic, it was mentioned that there is a dialogue ongoing on a new law on freedom of media. It was mentioned that opposition parties do not have access to public broadcasters. MEPs recommended that there is a need for adopting criteria for media and not have a law which can be used selectively.

Electoral reform and forthcoming parliamentary elections

The fourth sub-item was the electoral reform and forthcoming parliamentary elections. The speakers were Mr IBRAIMI and Mr PICULA.

In his speech, Mr IBRAIMI stated that the electoral lists were flawed and that many names and addresses on the lists were non-existent. Mr IBRAIMI stated that there had been use of counterfeited ID cards during the elections and that it had happened with the help of the Ministry of Interior Affairs. Mr IBRAIMI mentioned the use of threats towards public service and the prevention of people from voting during the elections. He stated that freedom of media is the key to fair elections. Mr IBRAIMI asked for transparency for the funding of political campaigns and political parties. Mr IBRAIMI welcomed the EU's efforts to restore free and fair election in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mr PICULA, expressed hope that independent experts were to be included in the State Election Commission. He stated that the appointments of the SEC has to happen without delay, as the SEC needs to take crucial decisions on the new secretary general, staffing and numerous technical issues, in order for the April elections to be credible. He stated that there has to be an audit of the voting lists. Mr PICULA stated that electoral reforms need to be seen as the backbone for leading the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia towards EU integration.

In the following debate, it was mentioned that every election in the country has improved the election registration. On the topic of SEC, it was stated that 3 experts, 3 members from the opposition parties and 3 members from the ruling party would make up the SEC. All members agreed that the voters' list must be examined fully.

The following members took part in the debates: Ms PETIR (MEP), Ms SPYRAKI (MEP), Mr PETERLE (MEP), Mr KOVATCHEV (MEP), Mr HASIPI (MP), Mr IBRAIMI (MP), Ms DIMOVA (MP), Mr SHILEGOV (MP), Mr GJORCHEV (MP), Mr MILESKI (MP), Ms DIMOVA (MP), Mr NIKOLOSKI (MP), Mr GRUBI (MP), Ms BONEVA (MP), Ms RANGELOVA (MP)

5. Exchange of views with Mr Nikola POPOSKI, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

In his speech, Mr POPOSKI thanked the EU for the help which it has provided to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Mr POPOSKI touched upon various subject including the latest progress report, geopolitics, European integration, relations with neighbouring countries and the migrant crisis. In the latest progress report, Mr POPOSKI stated that the government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is adopting the priorities and recommendations into the national action program. The relations with Russia, Turkey and China were asked about by MEPs. Mr POPOSKI underlined that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a European country but that it also wants good relations with other countries, and that Russia, Turkey and China does enjoy privileged relations. On the migration crisis, Mr POPOSKI emphasised that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has done a good job in treating the migrants in a humanitarian way, but also stated that country needs help to deal with the crisis from Europe and its neighbours. MEPs commented on the name-dispute with Greece, to which Mr POPOSKI answered that the dialogue is promising, even if it is the main obstacle for joining NATO and to EU integration. Mr POPOSKI stated that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a good example of a country in the region with good relations with its neighbours. The issue of infrastructure to neighbouring countries was brought up. Mr POPOSKI stated that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia currently improving its infrastructure to allow better access to its neighbours. Mr POPOSKI expressed hope that the EU will soon take a decision to allow the country to start negotiation talks.

6. Migration crisis: challenges, management and possible consequences

Mr NIKOLOSKI emphasised that there is a need for more solidarity between the Western Balkan countries and the EU in dealing with the migrant crisis. He stated that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia tries to provide the best and safest way of transit for the migrants. Mr NIKOLOSKI informed the members that the country is working on a special plan for the winter in cooperation with NGOs. He stated that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia needs two things for handling the migrant crisis: additional funds and help from the EU and clear strategy and guidelines from the EU. He asked the EP to initiate a drafting of mutually acceptable strategy for dealing with the migrant crisis.

Ms MALETIC stated that the migrant crisis is one of the biggest challenges in the world. She stated that the EU institutions are already in deep discussion on how to deal with the migrant crisis. Ms MALETIC underlined that the EU and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia must find a joint a solution on better border control and in identifying individuals entering the country. She stated that the EU has to find a better way to financially help the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. She stated that there is a great need for more financing and investment and a need for human capacity and infrastructure. Capacity has to be found to increase and strengthen border cooperation between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece.

In the following debate, MEPs and MPs questioned the usage of IPA funds for these purposes and stated that funds have been given to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to help with border and migrants. The reports of refugees' maltreatment by the police were discussed among members. Discrimination against refugees from certain countries was brought up and criticised by MEPs. In the discussion members agreed that the EU needs to do more to secure funds for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The following members took part in the debate: Mr CORRAO (MEP), Ms MALETIC (MEP), Mr NIKOLOSKI (MP), Mr HASIPI (MP)

7. Adoption of recommendations

The recommendations were adopted.

8. Any other business

There was no other business.

9. Date and place of the 14th meeting of the EU- former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee

The place and time for the next JPC meeting will be decided upon after the national elections in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The meeting ended on 4 December, at 12:22.
