

European Union - former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee

EU - former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 15th Meeting

19-20 September 2018, Skopje

Recommendations

Joint Parliamentary Committee held its 15th meeting in Skopje on 19 and 20 September 2018 under the joint Chairmanship of **Mr Alojz PETERLE** (EPP, Slovenia) and **Mr Goran MILEVSKI** (Liberal Democratic Party, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).

At this meeting, the Committee held an exchange of views with

- **Mr Andrej ZERNOVSKI**, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and
- **Ms Kalinka GABER**, State Secretary, Secretariat for European Affairs, on behalf of the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,
- **Ambassador Samuel ŽBOGAR**, Head of the EU Delegation in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, on behalf of the European Commission and the European External Action Service;

The Joint Parliamentary Committee exchanged views on the following topics:

- State of play of the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia relations
- Follow-up on reform process: results of 3-6-9 plan and the new "reform plan '18"
- Focus on the rule of law issues:
 - Judicial reforms
 - Fight against corruption and organized crime
 - Work of the SPO
 - Electoral reforms
 - Reforms of the intelligence system
- Situation of media
- Good-neighbourly relations and regional cooperation
- Report on the Jean Monnet Dialogue

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 Council conclusions of 28 June 2018, endorsing the conclusions adopted by the Council on 26 June 2018,

- B. The 2018 European Commission report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the February 2018 communication entitled ‘A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans’,
 - C. The recommendations from its 14th Joint Parliamentary Committee meeting of 7-8 February 2018 in Strasbourg,
 - D. The European Parliament Resolution of 14 June 2017 on the 2016 Commission report on the Republic of Macedonia (2016/2310(INI)),
 - E. The 14th meeting of the EU- the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Stabilisation and Association Council of 13 July 2018,
 - F. The declaration of the EU-Western Balkans summit of 17-18 May 2018 and the Sofia Priority Agenda,
 - G. The ‘Final Agreement for the Settlement of the Differences as described in the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993), the Termination of the Interim Accord of 1995, and the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership between the Parties,’ signed on 17 June 2018 at Lake Prespa,
 - H. The decision made by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization at its Brussels Summit of 11-12 July 2018 to invite the Government in Skopje to start accession talks.
 - I. The South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) Brdo Summit Declaration on 24 April 2018 and the London Summit Western Balkan Summit Declaration on 10 July 2018,
 - J. The European Bank of Reconstruction and Development Western Balkan Investment London Summit on 25 February 2018,
1. Welcomes the commitment of the European Union institutions to the credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans; takes due note of the Commission's country report of 17 April 2018 and its decision to recommend opening of accession talks; fully supports the endorsement by the European Council of the Council's conclusions of 26 June 2018 setting out the path towards opening of accession negotiations in June 2019; strongly welcomes the official launch of the screening process in July 2018;
 2. Reiterates the importance of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in prioritising the enlargement policy as the most effective instrument for guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity of the region; welcomes the intention of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union to continue focusing on EU enlargement;
 3. Believes that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is well-prepared for accession negotiations given its longstanding candidate status and that chapters 23 and 24 should be at the heart of the next stage of the accession procedure, having in mind their fundamental importance for reforms in the field of Rule of Law; reiterates that the opening of accession negotiations is a merit-based process and dependent on implementing genuine and sustainable reforms and underlines the need for both the government and opposition to continue implementing the Urgent Reform Priorities;

4. Takes note of the membership in the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, which should provide solid basis of the European integration process and strengthen the security and the cooperation among its member states; expresses expectation that the country will soon join the EU Adriatic – Ionian Strategy;
5. Welcomes the decision by the Council to allow the country to pass to the second stage of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement on 14 May 2018;
6. Welcomes therefore the continued efforts undertaken by the Government to advance integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures and the commitment to carry out all the reform steps in the priority areas, as well as to fulfil the obligations stemming from the Stabilisation and Association Agreement; underlines that these efforts have been recognised by the European Council of 28 June 2018;
7. Repeats its support for further implementation of the recommendations of the Senior Expert's Group on systemic Rule of Law issues with full cooperation between the political parties, state institutions and other stakeholders; notes government's commitment to advance the EU reform agenda under the 'Plan 18,' which aims to continue the reforms listed under the 'Plan 3/6/9' and to include core elements of the Urgent Reform Priorities and some recommendations of the Senior Experts' Group;
8. Welcomes the start of implementation of the judicial reform strategy and the adoption of the law on the protection of whistle-blowers; calls upon the authorities, however, to ensure full implementation of the judicial reform strategy and to consistently address all outstanding recommendations from the European Commission, Venice Commission and the Senior Experts' Group; calls for an urgent review of laws on anti-corruption, financial control and public procurement; reiterates that it is pivotal for the judiciary to act in a professional manner, free from undue influence and political interference; stresses that reform of the systems for the appointment, promotion, and dismissal of judges and prosecutors remains essential;
9. Underlines the need to ensure that the Special Prosecutor's Office can continue its important mission in a sustainable manner; reaffirms that the priority should be given to the effective fight against corruption and the necessity to have a credible track record on effective prosecution especially on high-level cases;
10. Urges the Parliament to regularly exercise its oversight role over the work of the Bureau for Security and Counterintelligence (UBK), and urges the completion of the reform of the interception of communications and ensure comprehensive reform of intelligence services; takes note of the good level of cooperation with the European Union in developing the legislative reform package concerning interception of communications; urges the authorities to promptly establish the Operation Technical Agency to ensure that there can be no political interference in the process of activating interceptions;
11. Repeats its condemnation of the violent incident of 27 April 2017 in the Parliament; takes note of the Skopje Criminal Court first-instance verdict of 5 July 2018; stresses that the establishment of accountability for these acts of violence should continue to be conducted in line with the law and in a transparent, independent and proportionate manner; underlines that legal proceedings must not be instrumentalised for political gains;
12. Welcomes the adoption by consensus of the new Code of Ethics by the Parliament, recognises the importance of the Jean Monnet Dialogue meetings in Ohrid on 17-19 May in

this regard, calls on all parties to continue the dialogue on the amendments to the Rules of Procedure; stresses that filibustering and non-participation in parliamentary activities and any other form of obstruction do not contribute to the proper functioning of the Parliament and to reconciliation; emphasises the necessity to have a parliamentary dialogue that includes the opposition parties in line with the new Code of Ethics;

13. Strongly commends the recent steps taken to enhance the bilateral relations with neighbouring countries in the framework of maintaining good neighbourly relations; welcomes the ratification by Parliament of the agreement with Greece; notes positively the decision of the authorities to organise a referendum on the agreement; notes that this referendum should be conducted in line with earlier recommendations issued by OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission; expects political parties to play a constructive role during the campaign; calls for all political parties to respect the final outcome of the referendum; urges the enactment of the necessary preconditions regarding the formal adoption of the agreement and its entering into force;
14. Welcomes the ratification of the bilateral treaty with Bulgaria by both sides and encourages its full implementation; stresses that maintaining good neighbourly relations remains essential; reiterates that statements which negatively impact on good neighbourly relations should be avoided;
15. Reiterates the importance of regional cooperation and the role of the SEECP, the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), as well as the enhanced Berlin Process cooperation framework and emphasises the need for close coordination among those frameworks;
16. Appreciates the sustained change in media climate in the recent period; calls upon the authorities to continue reforming the public broadcaster and to encourage the development of a more enabling media environment by promoting objectivity and reporting accuracy and media freedom independent monitoring;
17. Welcomes the country's ratification of the Istanbul Convention on 23 March 2018 and urges it to complete legal reforms for tackling discrimination and violence against women and girls and to continue eradicating domestic and gender-based violence; welcomes the establishment of the inter-party group on the rights of disabled persons, LGBTI persons and Roma in the *Sobranie* and urges to step up the implementation of the 2014-2020 Roma Inclusion Strategy and corresponding action plans;
18. Welcomes the constructive role played by civil society in supporting democratic processes, complements the government for further improving the climate in which they operate; stresses the importance of engaging civil society in the referendum on the agreement reached with Greece given the importance of the agreement for the country's European integration and enhance partnership with civil society in a transparent way;
19. Continues to emphasise the importance of implementing the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA); notes the commitment of the new government to build greater trust among all communities; takes note of the adoption by Parliament of the Law on the Use of Languages; emphasises that its implementation should be in line with the European standards and practices;
20. Welcomes the progress made in setting up the structures to implement the Transport Community Treaty signed at the 2017 Trieste Summit, most notably the decision to establish the secretariat in Belgrade; encourages the government to step up the

implementation of other elements of the 'Connectivity Agenda' and welcomes the gradual lowering of regional mobile roaming charges in this regard; commends the authorities for hosting the first Western Balkans Digital Summit in Skopje and appreciates the country's constructive participation in the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia and in the Western Balkans Summit in London;

21. Acknowledges and welcomes country's efforts to address the challenges of the European migration and refugee crisis and expresses the expectation that mutually beneficial cooperation continues in the future; takes note of the continued need to manage mixed migration flows in coordination with the EU member states; welcomes the initialing of the Status Agreement regulating the cooperation with European Border and Coast Guard Agency and delineating the actions to be carried out by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency; urges the country to put in place a return mechanism for irregular migrants and to align its visa policy progressively with that of the European Union;
22. Acknowledges the progress made in modernising transport networks and in particular the efforts to complete Corridor X; takes note in this regard of the opening of the Demir Kapija - Smokvica motorway; welcomes the government's intention to upgrade or construct railway and motorway links from Skopje to neighbouring major cities; believes that completion of the Skopje-Blace segment of the R6 Motorway would significantly bolster regional transport links;
23. Reiterates the importance of the work of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) in Tirana, and positively notes its organization of the Strategic Planning Conference held in Skopje on 21 March 2018, as well as its activities for promotion of youth cooperation in the region; in this sense, also supports the Young Political Leaders Conference of the European Parliament and the European Commission, which is a follow-up initiative of the Berlin process, as a good basis for regional youth dialogue and for exchange of best practices in the promotion of youth policy agenda; expects that the Conference on 20-21 September 2018 to make its strong contribution in this domain;
24. Welcomes the timely submission of the Economic Reform Programme and the improvements made concerning the programme's analytical diagnostics and the consultative process with external stakeholders; takes note however of the recent lack of economic growth and urges the government to address structural weaknesses of the economy, such as the high unemployment rate and the large degree of informality; recalls that development of a functional market economy is a key criteria for EU membership;
25. Reiterates the need for the authorities of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to tackle environmental concerns, especially concerning the poor air quality in Skopje and other cities, which causes thousands of premature deaths every year; calls on the government to adopt the law on industrial emissions and related implementing legislation, to make more progress on transposing the SEVESO III Directive, EU Eco Label Regulations and EMAS, and to start implementing the Paris Agreement; welcomes government's position to reopen the Jugohrom plant only once it meets the required environmental standards;
26. Recalls that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia completed its last population census in 2002; urges the government to conduct a new and long-overdue population census to obtain proper and realistic demographic statistics in line with European standards;

27. Takes note of the decision made during the Brussels Summit of 11-12 July 2018 by leaders of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to invite the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to start the accession process.