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on the 2021 Commission Report on North Macedonia
(2021/2248(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the 2021 Commission Report on North Macedonia (2021/2248(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of North Macedonia, of the other part¹,
- having regard to North Macedonia's application for membership of the European Union of 22 March 2004,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 September 2021 establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III)²,
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 19-20 June 2003 and the Thessaloniki Agenda for the Western Balkans,
- having regard to the European Council decision of 16 December 2005 to grant North Macedonia EU membership candidate status,
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 28 June 2018,
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 17-18 October 2019,
- having regard to the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation between Bulgaria and North Macedonia, signed on 1 August 2017 and ratified in January 2018,
- having regard to the Final Agreement for the Settlement of the Differences as described in UN Security Council resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993), the termination of the Interim Accord of 1995, and the establishment of a Strategic Partnership between Greece and North Macedonia on 17 June 2018, also known as the Prespa Agreement,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 5 June 2020 on enhancing cooperation with Western Balkans partners in the field of migration and security,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 18 June 2019, 25 March 2020 and 14 December 2021 on the enlargement and stabilisation and association process,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 5 February 2020 entitled 'Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans'

¹OJ L 84, 20.3.2004, p. 13.

² OJ L 330, 20.9.2021, p. 1.

- (COM(2020)0057),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 29 April 2020 entitled ‘Support to the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery’ (COM(2020)0315),
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 24 July 2020 entitled ‘2020-2025 EU action plan on firearms trafficking’ (COM(2020)0608),
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 6 October 2020 entitled ‘An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans’ (COM(2020)0641),
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 14 April 2021 on the EU Strategy to tackle Organised Crime 2021-2025 (COM(2021)0170),
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 19 October 2021 entitled ‘2021 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy’ (COM(2021)0644), accompanied by the Commission staff working document entitled ‘North Macedonia 2021 Report’ (SWD(2021)0294),
 - having regard to the Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism,
 - having regard to the final report of 2 October 2020 of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Election Observation Mission on North Macedonia’s early parliamentary elections of 15 July 2020 and to its final report of 25 March 2022 on the local elections of 17 and 31 October 2022,
 - having regard to the Venice Commission’s opinion of 18 October 2021 on the draft law on the state of emergency and to its previous opinions,
 - having regard to the EU-Western Balkans summits held in Sofia, Zagreb and Brdo pri Kranju in 2018, 2020 and 2021, and to their respective declarations,
 - having regard to the Sofia Summit of 10 November 2020, including the Declaration on the Common Regional Market and the Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans,
 - having regard to the Sofia Declaration of the EU-Western Balkans summit of 17 May 2018 and the Sofia priority agenda annexed thereto,
 - having regard to the 8th Berlin Process Summit of 5 July 2021,
 - having regard to the final declaration of the 8th Western Balkans Civil Society Forum dated 1 October 2021,
 - having regard to European Court of Auditors Special Report 01/2022 of 10 January 2022 entitled ‘EU support for the rule of law in the Western Balkans: despite efforts, fundamental problems persist’,

- having regard to its resolution of 24 October 2019 on opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania³,
 - having regard to its recommendation of 19 June 2020 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Western Balkans, following the 2020 summit⁴,
 - having regard to its resolution of 25 November 2020 entitled ‘Strengthening media freedom: the protection of journalists in Europe, hate speech, disinformation and the role of platforms’⁵,
 - having regard to its resolution of 15 December 2021 on cooperation on the fight against organised crime in the Western Balkans⁶,
 - having regard to its resolution of 8 March 2022 on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation⁷,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on North Macedonia,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0133/2022),
- A. whereas EU integration represents the aspirations of citizens of North Macedonia towards democracy and prosperity and serves as a powerful catalyst for reforms that improve quality of life and the functioning of state institutions and contribute to economic growth and regional cooperation; whereas the prospect of the merit-based membership of North Macedonia is in the Union’s own political, security and economic interests;
- B. whereas North Macedonia is a trustworthy partner, having continued to make consistent progress on its path towards membership of the EU and having fulfilled and sustained the conditions required for the opening of accession negotiations, while also fully aligning itself with the EU’s foreign and security policy, including sanctions on Russia;
- C. whereas the EU must provide a clear pathway for countries seeking to join the EU;
- D. whereas North Macedonia has been a candidate country since 2005; whereas the Commission has continuously recommended opening accession negotiations since 2009 and the country has shown dedicated commitment on its path towards joining the EU, resulting in the Council’s decision of 26 March 2020 to open accession negotiations;
- E. whereas the Prespa Agreement and the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation are landmark agreements that represent a model for stability and

³ OJ C 202, 28.5.2021, p. 86.

⁴ OJ C 362, 8.9.2021, p. 129.

⁵ OJ C 425, 20.10.2021, p. 28.

⁶ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2021)0506.

⁷ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2022)0064.

reconciliation throughout the Western Balkans and have improved the spirit of good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation;

- F. whereas North Macedonia has maintained a steady and determined pace in advancing EU reforms, with a focus on the fundamentals, and should continue keeping up the reform momentum and demonstrating the best democratic transition record across the Western Balkan region;
 - G. whereas the misuse of the accession process for the settlement of cultural and historical disputes is setting a dangerous precedent for future accession processes and jeopardises the Union's credibility, impact and transformative power;
 - H. whereas NATO membership marks a clear step towards greater stability, interoperability and defence integration into the Euro-Atlantic community;
 - I. whereas the EU remains fully committed to supporting North Macedonia's strategic objective of EU integration, on the basis of the rule of law and good neighbourly relations, and continues to be North Macedonia's biggest trade and investment partner by far and largest provider of financial assistance, notably through IPA III, the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) for the Western Balkans and Macro-Financial Assistance; including substantial support to address the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - J. whereas European integration is an effective foreign policy instrument that contributes to the promotion of peace and the spread of the EU's fundamental values of respect for democracy, human rights, the rule of law and freedom of expression;
 - K. whereas malign foreign direct and proxy interference and disinformation aim to sow discord, provoke violence and inter-ethnic tensions, and destabilise the whole region;
1. Reiterates its clear support for North Macedonia's commitment to democracy and the rule of law, underpinned by its strategic pro-European orientation, unwavering commitment to European values, EU-related reforms and the process of EU integration, and good neighbourly relations and inclusive regional cooperation;
 2. Regrets the Council's failure to officially open long overdue accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania; emphasises its full solidarity with and sympathies for the countries' citizens and considers this failure, which undermines public attitudes towards the EU and poses a serious danger to enlargement policy as a whole, to be damaging to the EU's reputation as a reliable partner and serious geopolitical actor;
 3. Reaffirms the geostrategic importance of North Macedonia and the whole Western Balkans region and their future as part of the EU; reminds Member States that enlargement policy must be driven by objective criteria; reiterates that the EU's enlargement policy has been the Union's most effective foreign policy instrument, and that full integration of the Western Balkans is in the EU's political, security and economic interests as a geostrategic investment in a stable and thriving Union; emphasises that the official start of accession negotiations will be an investment in the credibility of the EU, as well as in stability, prosperity and ongoing reconciliation processes in the region;

4. Calls on the EU to take concrete steps in the integration of the Western Balkans within a broader strategic and security context, including the security implications of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, possible Russian influence in the region and malicious activities seeking to undermine the political stability and EU integration of the Western Balkan countries; recalls the transformative nature of the accession negotiations to be conducted under the revised enlargement methodology;
5. Recalls that the EU is founded on overcoming regional disputes and a difficult past in order to work towards a better, peaceful and prosperous future; calls on Bulgaria and North Macedonia to swiftly find an agreement that resolves bilateral issues in order to prevent further delays and barriers to the accession progress;
6. Urges the Council to demonstrate full political commitment to enlargement and to accelerate the pace and strengthen the credibility of EU integration by officially starting accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, especially in the geostrategic context of relations with Russia and its aggression against Ukraine, given that both countries have fulfilled the necessary conditions and delivered sustained results, including across the areas of the fundamentals;
7. Commends North Macedonia on its steady progress on the path towards EU membership, its commitment to implementing the Ohrid Framework Agreement in ensuring multiculturalism and inter-ethnic harmony, and its continued positive and coherent efforts to resolve pending bilateral issues; welcomes the strategic approach towards the EU-related reforms, including under the ‘Europe at Home’ agenda and the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis;
8. Underscores that the pace of EU accession should be determined by progress on the proper functioning of democratic institutions, grounded in the rule of law, good governance and fundamental rights; complements North Macedonia on its continuous efforts to strengthen the rule of law, judicial independence and minority rights, counter corruption and organised crime, reform its public administration and consolidate media freedom; encourages the country to sustain and intensify these efforts;

Functioning of democratic institutions

9. Welcomes the fact that North Macedonia continues to demonstrate the best democratic transition record across the Western Balkan region, with a marked improvement in transparency, political dialogue and electoral competitiveness;
10. Welcomes all efforts to reduce polarisation and step up constructive political dialogue and urges political parties to play a more constructive role in this regard, which will help to strengthen democratic institutions by further improving their governance, integrity and accountability;
11. Reaffirms the need to maintain constructive engagement between government and opposition and a broad cross-party consensus on EU-related reforms, by further strengthening the legislative, oversight and budgetary capacities of the Assembly of North Macedonia (Sobranie); welcomes North Macedonia’s continued cross-party political commitment to the Jean Monnet Dialogue (JMD) process, strengthening the ability of political leaders to develop true inter-party dialogue and to build the

consensus necessary for generating trust and a democratic parliamentary culture; urges lawmakers to swiftly implement the commitment to revising its rules of procedure made under the JMD and to intensify dialogue with the European Parliament and national parliaments;

12. Welcomes the increasing transparency and accountability of the Sobranie and urges it to improve legislative quality, including by conducting proper consultations and impact assessments for key legislation, to limit the use of fast-track procedures strictly to a minimum and to reduce parliamentary polarisation; welcomes cross-party support for the adoption of laws on the prevention of and protection against discrimination, violence against women and domestic violence, and amendments to the law on the rights of the child;
13. Stresses the need to finalise the electoral reforms in a timely, transparent and inclusive manner in line with the outstanding OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and Venice Commission recommendations; welcomes the smooth and competitive running of the local elections of 17 and 31 October 2021, which were held in a free and fair manner;
14. Invites North Macedonia's political parties to improve the transparency of party financing and to enhance competitive intra-party democracy and integrity;
15. Calls for continued reform towards a merit-based, accountable public administration, with improved professional independence and lines of accountability, a streamlined institutional framework, and intra-service coordination on EU integration and related reforms, simplified administrative procedures and improved local governance; acknowledges the steps taken to enhance efficiency and the quality of services and eliminate corruption through digitalisation;
16. Welcomes the holding of the 2021 population census in line with the relevant UN standards and the EU's statistical legislation, which should lead to improved evidence-based decision-making; welcomes the publication of its results and looks forward to their implementation in policy-making;
17. Calls for further steps to ensure the systemic accountability of public institutions through meaningful public stakeholder consultations, and welcomes the progress made in the area thus far;
18. Urges the Government of North Macedonia to ensure adequate funding and consistent implementation of the decisions and recommendations of independent bodies and agencies, such as the Ombudsman;
19. Welcomes the establishment of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination and its ongoing work; urges the government to allocate the resources necessary to enable it to be fully functional;

Media and civil society

20. Recalls the need to further align, in an inclusive and transparent manner, the legal framework for online and offline media in accordance with the EU acquis and EU

standards in cooperation with professional associations, civil society and experts in order to strengthen their independence from political, private and other external interference, ensuring transparency of ownership, financial sustainability and self-regulation; calls on the Government of North Macedonia to allocate sufficient resources to ensure the professionalisation and independence of the public broadcaster;

21. Reiterates its calls for the rules governing state financing and political party advertisements in the media to be revamped in order to ensure the competitive and equitable distribution of public funding and safeguard fair competition and editorial independence;
22. Encourages swift measures to step up editorial and financial independence, impartiality and the professionalism of public service broadcasters and media regulators, and welcomes the ongoing modernisation of these two bodies;
23. Calls for the implementation of measures that increase the safety of media professionals and tackle attempts to intimidate them; stresses the importance of enforcing a zero-tolerance approach to intimidation, threats and acts of violence against journalists; notes the need to investigate and prosecute any such attempts and to improve the working conditions of journalists in order to ensure quality journalism;
24. Recalls the need to strengthen independent investigative journalism, non-biased fact-checking and media literacy as means to tackle hate speech, disinformation and foreign interference campaigns, which have intensified during the COVID-19 emergency and the Russian war against Ukraine; underlines the importance of institutional cooperation in setting up an effective framework to tackle manipulative disinformation; calls for efforts to be stepped up to ensure media plurality and independence and to foster a media environment free from external influences and conducive to professional media conduct in North Macedonia; expresses support for advancing media and cultural pluralism to foster cultural awareness and exchange and to improve mutual understanding;
25. Commends the government's efforts to improve engagement with civil society and calls for a framework to ensure the financial sustainability of civil society organisations, including those representing and defending the rights of the various ethnic communities; recalls that further efforts are needed to ensure a more timely, meaningful and transparent consultation process with civil society in this regard; welcomes positive examples of synergy between civil society and institutions, such as the creation of the Inter-Party Parliamentary Group on LGBTI+ Rights;

Fundamental rights

26. Notes the improvements in ensuring women's rights and gender-responsive policies; welcomes the adoption of the law aimed at preventing violence against women and domestic violence and encourages the country to enhance the implementation of the national action plan for the implementation of the provisions of the Istanbul Convention; invites North Macedonia to continue all efforts aimed at gender equality and women's rights, including by prioritising gender mainstreaming and increased cooperation with civil society, in particular women's organisations;

27. Calls on North Macedonia to take steps to ensure an adequate representation of women in all decision-making positions, and to further address the lack of implementation of women workers' rights and tackle gender stereotyping, gender imbalance and the gender pay gap in the labour force; points to significant gender differences in terms of participation and quality of work, insufficient action on sexual harassment in the workplace, discrimination in legal provisions related to maternity leave and the lack of childcare and pre-school capacity; acknowledges the amendments to the law on the rights of the child and the completion of the deinstitutionalisation process;
28. Encourages ongoing steps to build further trust among communities and in the functioning of a multi-ethnic society and democracy, while recalling the importance of upholding the rights of all communities and effectively tackling all instances of discrimination; encourages the government to ensure equal constitutional protection of the rights of all ethnic communities, where appropriate through legislative amendments, and to protect and promote their cultural heritage, languages and traditions through equal, inclusive and non-discriminatory access to education and the media;
29. Calls on the authorities to develop a new strategy to tackle the issues faced by the Roma community, replacing the previous strategy which expired in 2020, and to reconsider the decision to reduce the budget for Roma inclusion, which should in fact be increased;
30. Welcomes the success of the second Skopje Pride held in 2021; calls on the Parliament of North Macedonia to urgently adopt a national action plan on LGBTI+ issues and to ensure the allocation of sufficient resources for its implementation; urges all political actors to amend the Law on Civil Registry and ensure swift and unimpeded legal gender recognition on the basis of self-determination;
31. Calls for further improvements in the enforcement of the rights of persons belonging to minorities, including self-identification and inclusive intercultural education; stresses the importance of updating and adopting education laws which remove discriminatory and stigmatising content and are harmonised with the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination;
32. Stresses the need for further progress to ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities are upheld; welcomes the mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities established within the Ombudsman's Office; stresses the need to combat the discrimination faced by people with disabilities, both direct and indirect, as a result of infrastructure-related barriers, a lack of information and services, discriminatory attitudes and social exclusion; urges the authorities to finalise the deinstitutionalisation process promptly; stresses the need for adequate resources and infrastructure to uphold the necessary social protection and ensure decent living conditions for people with disabilities in North Macedonia;
33. Urges the relevant bodies to proactively prevent and systematically prosecute all instances of hate speech, hate crimes and intimidation, to thoroughly investigate related attacks and to ensure the safety and security of their targets, such as journalists, people belonging to minorities and other vulnerable groups; reiterates its call for the relevant authorities to improve institutional capacities to prevent and combat hate speech, hate crime and discrimination on any grounds in accordance with international standards;

34. Urges all political actors to put a stop to and condemn hate speech, smear campaigns and the harassment of independent civil society organisations and calls on the competent authorities to enforce a zero-tolerance approach to intimidation, threats and acts of violence against journalists and human rights defenders and ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice;
35. Is concerned by the stark increase in misinformation and discriminatory speech against LGBTI+ people and human rights defenders in the media and political discourse; condemns harassment, hate speech, hate crimes and death threats levelled at LGBTI+ people and rights defenders and urges the full investigation and sanctioning of these incidents;
36. Recalls the need to step up independent police oversight, prevent and ensure accountability for police impunity against marginalised communities, such as Roma, and improve the treatment of detainees and prison conditions through the full implementation of the relevant recommendations;
37. Welcomes the ongoing endeavours of the authorities of Bulgaria and North Macedonia to build a respectful relationship based on mutual trust, rapprochement and closer people-to-people contacts; strongly condemns inflammatory rhetoric and urges the strengthening of mutual efforts to prevent and prosecute all instances of hate speech and hate crimes based on national or ethnic origin;
38. Welcomes North Macedonia's membership of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance;
39. Recalls the need to open up Yugoslav secret service (UDBA) and Yugoslav People's Army secret service (KOS) archives across the region in order to thoroughly research and address communist-era crimes and criminal organisations; takes the view that transparent handling of totalitarian crimes, including the opening-up of these archives, is a step towards further democratisation, accountability and institutional strength;
40. Calls for the EU to boost its support for humanitarian assistance and border management in the region, to be conducted with full respect for fundamental rights; commends North Macedonia's efforts to host refugees and the continued constructive role the country plays in managing irregular migration; reiterates its calls for the country to improve access to asylum and reception conditions and to put in place a proper migration management and registration system; recalls the need to adopt a systematic approach to countering people smuggling and addressing irregular migration, welcomes international cooperation in this regard and notes that the status agreement with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) has not yet been signed owing to pending bilateral issues;

Rule of law

41. Underlines, while acknowledging the progress made, the need to push forward the rule of law reform as the backbone of democratic transformation, ensuring legal certainty, transparency, access to justice and non-discrimination;
42. Urges the Commission to implement the recommendations of the European Court of

Auditors Special Report 01/2022 to ensure the effective rule-of-law impact of financial assistance in the Western Balkans, including in North Macedonia;

43. Welcomes further steps to consolidate the track record on investigating, prosecuting and trying corruption and organised crime cases, including at a high level, and strengthening independent oversight institutions and judicial systems;
44. Recalls that the updates to the penal code should cover, inter alia, the provisions on violence against women, economic crime, money laundering, corruption, asset confiscation and the dissemination of disinformation, and should step up the fight against organised crime, including illegal timber cutting;
45. Emphasises the need to further advance the judicial reform, thereby strengthening the institutional independence, funding, quality, coordination and transparency of the judiciary and the functioning of its self-governance bodies; urges political forces to swiftly agree on appointing Constitutional Court judges to ensure its proper functioning;
46. Welcomes the considerable progress made and supports the measures enforced in countering corruption and organised crime, such as under the 'Action 21' anti-corruption plan, including through proactive investigations by the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption and the Prosecutor for Organised Crime and Corruption, which have prioritised convictions and the confiscation of criminal assets in high-level cases; calls on the Member States to enhance cross-border judicial cooperation with the Western Balkan countries in criminal matters, while fully respecting the EU data protection acquis;
47. Calls for the finalisation of the security and intelligence sector reform measures, ensuring the independence of the sector and meaningful parliamentary oversight; calls for the whistle-blower protection mechanism to be updated, improving alignment with and the implementation of the EU Directive on Whistleblowers⁸ and Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)7 on the protection of whistleblowers and ensuring the effective implementation of the newly amended lobbying law;
48. Underlines the importance of continuing to establish legal accountability, including in all major lawsuits related to the abuse of office, police impunity, corruption, the 2017 attacks in the Parliament of North Macedonia, illegal wiretapping and extortion;
49. Underlines the importance of pursuing consistent and proactive investigations, prosecution and final convictions in cases of high-level corruption;
50. Calls for decisive action against money laundering and financial crime to be pursued through enhanced coordination, including with Europol, while fully aligning with and respecting the EU data acquis; urges the strengthening of the capacity of law enforcement bodies to fight organised crime, terrorism and radicalisation; calls on the authorities to adopt and implement the necessary legislation to regulate the activity of the Asset Recovery Office and enhance the effectiveness of the national asset recovery

⁸ Directive (EU) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2019 on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law, OJ L 305, 26.11.2019, p. 17.

system;

51. Welcomes the sustained progress made so far, which should lead to systemic improvements in tackling the trafficking of humans, drugs, firearms and goods, along with cybercrime and surveillance, violent crime, extremism and terrorist threats; commends the investigations into and ongoing bilateral and international cooperation on dismantling transnational crime networks, including with international and EU justice and home affairs agencies, such as Eurojust, Europol and Frontex, which have intensified action against the trafficking of humans, drugs and illegal weapons and the danger of radicalisation; notes North Macedonia's political, operational and logistical support to Frontex and the border and coast guard services of Member States; urges North Macedonia to strengthen its resilience to hybrid threats, disinformation and fake news; deplores the cyberattacks conducted against the country's institutions;

Socio-economic reforms

52. Takes note of the serious economic and social impact of the COVID-19 crisis and expresses support for the range of measures taken by the authorities to protect public health and mitigate the socio-economic impact of the crisis, including putting to good use the substantial support provided by the EU in terms of financial assistance, medical equipment and vaccines; welcomes North Macedonia's faster-than-expected recovery in 2021 and increased economic growth;
53. Recommends that North Macedonia continue to pursue steps to improve the business climate and infrastructure under the Growth Acceleration Financing Plan, combat tax evasion, modernise education, broaden social security coverage, advance the digital transformation, and reform the energy and transport markets, in addition to short-term measures to mitigate the impact of pandemics and rising energy and food prices;
54. Welcomes the steps taken to establish a direct personal taxation system based on progressive rates; notes the return to a flat tax model; encourages the government to modernise the tax code so as to place a higher focus on progressive rates on income and the taxation of property and environmental factors, in order to produce sufficient value to implement social reforms and combat inequality;
55. Encourages the authorities to reduce poverty and social exclusion by improving universal access to social, education and healthcare services, in particular for disadvantaged populations and vulnerable groups;
56. Encourages North Macedonia to continue making progress in the implementation of reforms related to youth and education; calls for the revision of the Law on Secondary Education through an inclusive process involving experts, practitioners and civil society, paying particular attention to the rights of students with disabilities;
57. Encourages North Macedonia to continue harnessing the potential offered by digitalisation for modernising administrative, electoral, judicial, social, health, fiscal and economic processes, increasing transparency and accountability, and tackling corruption and the informal economy in line with the EU acquis; underlines the need to step up EU support for the rule of law, sustainable green growth, biodiversity, innovation, competitiveness, property rights, and the reversal of the brain drain and

demographic decline; underlines the need to boost investment in youth empowerment and inclusion, along with measures to reduce high levels of youth unemployment;

58. Welcomes the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in North Macedonia as a programme for reducing youth unemployment, particularly considering the economic precariousness and reduced job opportunities for young people caused by the COVID-19 pandemic; reiterates the importance of funds made available through the EIP for the Western Balkans for flagship projects such as the Youth Guarantee in North Macedonia;
59. Recalls that EU funding under IPA III and the EIP for the Western Balkans, instruments which it welcomes, is based on strict conditionality; stresses that IPA III envisages that funding must be modulated or even suspended in the case of significant regression or a persistent lack of progress in the area of the fundamentals, notably in the field of the rule of law and fundamental rights, including the fight against corruption and organised crime, as well as media freedom; stresses that it is in the EU's own security interests and its responsibility to guarantee that EU funds do not contribute to corruption; calls for the EU and the Western Balkan countries, in this context, to enhance cross-border judicial cooperation and establish a framework for effective cooperation with the European Public Prosecutor's Office, in particular in the area of IPA III funds; underlines the need to improve the visibility of EU funding and to ensure that any investment is in line with the objectives of the Paris Agreement and EU decarbonisation targets;
60. Welcomes the adoption of the EIP and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, aiming to spur the long-term economic recovery of the region, support a green and digital transition, and foster regional connectivity and integration and convergence with the European Union; recalls the potential for European cooperation in areas such as water management, wastewater and waste treatment technologies, renewable energy, agricultural and food processing technologies, ICT, pharmaceuticals and medical equipment; stresses the importance of enhanced coordination with international organisations such as the UN Environment Programme in addressing climate change and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals;

Environment, energy and transport

61. Urges the government to step up its ambitions considerably and increase political will to implement last year's recommendations regarding the green transition, notably in the context of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, harnessing the potential of the EIP for the Western Balkans in this regard;
62. Welcomes North Macedonia's updated climate pledge of a net 82 % greenhouse gas emission reduction by 2030, while calling for the implementation of the Paris Agreement, including by adopting a comprehensive climate strategy and a law consistent with the EU 2030 climate and energy framework; recalls that additional efforts are needed to meet the targets for energy efficiency, renewable energy, security of supply and emission reductions; urges the EU to intensify its support for countering the reversal of a sustainable transition from coal and to progressively phase out fossil energy sources in the face of the global energy crunch; urges the authorities to align

environment and climate change legislation with the EU acquis and to ensure its enforcement;

63. Stresses the urgent need to improve air quality, in particular in urban areas; strongly urges the authorities to step up measures on biodiversity, water, air and climate protection, recycling and regional waste management, including through comprehensive impact assessments, proper public consultations, improved inter-sectoral coordination, increased financial resources and rigorous prosecution of environmental crime;
64. Urges the authorities to significantly improve the quality of their strategic environmental assessments (SEA), and to implement and enforce the SEA Directive⁹ with a view to effectively preventing a negative ecological impact and rooting out corruption in the sector; calls on the authorities to fully take into account the recommendation of environmental organisations and independent experts on the proposed amendments to the Law on Urbanisation;
65. Encourages the Commission to offer full support to North Macedonia in drafting and implementing an action plan intended to reduce dependence on energy sources imported from Russia, with the aim of increasing resilience and energy security, as well as enabling it to meet EU aspirations for climate neutrality; acknowledges the country's increasing alignment with the EU's third energy package and urges that the unbundling of gas transmission be finalised and the energy efficiency legislation be implemented;
66. Urges the country to step up efforts to upgrade transport and energy infrastructure, as well as regional connectivity; reiterates the importance of the speedy completion of major regional infrastructure projects, while fully respecting the proper procedures for the required comprehensive impact assessments, including rail and road corridors VIII and X, gas interconnectors with Bulgaria, Greece, Kosovo and Serbia, and the electricity interconnector with Albania;
67. Welcomes the opening of an air connection between Skopje and Sofia and encourages the improvement of other transport connections and the opening of new border checkpoints with neighbouring countries;
68. Welcomes the lifting of roaming fees among North Macedonia and five other Western Balkan states as of 1 July 2021; urges, in that respect, the creation of a fast-track road map to reduce and eliminate roaming charges across all Member States;

Regional cooperation and foreign policy

69. Calls for the EU to critically assess historically important security implications for stability and unity on the European continent and in the Western Balkans in the context of the Russian aggression against Ukraine; urges Member States to demonstrate European unity by officially starting accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania, considering both geopolitical implications and the fulfilment of official criteria, as an investment in trust, stability, prosperity and the ongoing reconciliation

⁹ Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2001 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, OJ L 197, 21.7.2001, p. 30.

process in the region;

70. Welcomes North Macedonia's commitment to solidarity, multilateralism and good neighbourly relations; expresses support for EU integration and continued steps to promote both people-to-people contacts across South-East Europe and inclusive regional integration, bringing the whole region closer to the EU by developing the Common Regional Market; expresses its support for inclusive regional economic cooperation schemes establishing cooperation on an equal footing among all six countries, strengthening alignment with EU standards and the EU acquis, and contributing to EU integration processes;
71. Looks forward to North Macedonia's OSCE Chairmanship in 2023 as a manifestation of its international responsibility and reliability as a NATO member and future EU Member State, and as a contribution to the promotion of the OSCE founding principles in the area of security, human rights and democracy; commends North Macedonia's exemplarily rapid integration into NATO structures, highlighting its strategic security choices and thus contributing to and providing stability in the Western Balkans;
72. Welcomes North Macedonia's continued commitment to the Euro-Atlantic security framework; commends the country's full alignment with the EU's common foreign, security and defence policy; welcomes its continued contributions to EU crisis management missions and NATO-led operations; commends its swift alignment with the sanctions imposed in the context of the Russian aggression aimed at undermining the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, thereby increasing its foreign policy alignment to 100 %;
73. Notes the risks of increasing economic and energy dependence on China and Russia throughout the region; is concerned about the vulnerability and dependency that arise from investment loans funded by China; welcomes North Macedonia's commitment to ensuring border security, along with data privacy and security under the 'Clean Network' initiative;
74. Welcomes the ongoing process of strengthening good neighbourly relations with neighbouring countries and enhanced regional cooperation, embodied by the Prespa Agreement with Greece and the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation with Bulgaria; appeals to all parties to continue to pursue constructive dialogue so as to ensure their full and consistent implementation in good faith, while refraining from actions that might undermine EU integration and the EU's wider interests in the face of foreign interference; calls on the Commission to step up its efforts to facilitate dialogue, and thus pave the way for a viable and sustainable agreement;
75. Encourages Bulgaria and North Macedonia to find a mutually acceptable solution to pending bilateral issues; strongly welcomes the political impetus for wide-ranging, constructive engagement between both sides, seeking new common ground in multiple areas of mutual interest, rather than drawing further lines of division; encourages the partners to accelerate this engagement in good faith and in accordance with the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation and to start accession negotiations, while resolving the pending bilateral issues contained in the '4+1

measures' to be sufficiently implemented and addressed during the EU integration process; urges the partners to strive sincerely to reach mutually acceptable, balanced and sustainable solutions to pending bilateral issues as quickly as possible; welcomes the resumption of the work of the Joint Multidisciplinary Expert Commission on Historical and Educational Issues of Bulgaria and North Macedonia, thereby bringing societies closer together by enabling a common future in the EU, while having no bearing on the accession process of North Macedonia;

76. Reiterates its full support for the consistent and accelerated mutual implementation of the Prespa Agreement with Greece as an important element of bilateral relations, including the pending ratification of the memoranda signed between the two countries;
77. Congratulates North Macedonia on the inauguration of the Prespa Forum Dialogue, as a regional platform to inspire and promote dialogue, reconciliation, good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation in the spirit of EU integration;
78. Calls once again on all regional political leaders to set up the Regional Commission for Establishing the Facts about War Crimes and Other Gross Violations of Human Rights Committed on the Territory of the former Yugoslavia (RECOM), building upon the significant work carried out by the Coalition for RECOM;
79. Strongly urges that the work on school history textbooks in Bulgaria and North Macedonia be resumed; stresses that the texts should reflect the interpretation of historical facts and figures from the common history of both peoples, based on authentic historical documents/sources; believes that this is the foundation on which the two countries should build their relations, and that the relationship between the future generations of North Macedonia and Bulgaria will be a reflection of the education processes in the two countries;
80. Condemns any attempt to replace historical monuments and/or artefacts, including the destruction of authentic cultural heritage and any attempts to rewrite history; stresses that such incidents raise serious concerns, including in the context of the lack of implementation of the 2017 Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation;

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81. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the President of the European Council, the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, and the President, Government and Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

Date adopted	20.4.2022
Result of final vote	+: 66 -: 4 0: 5
Members present for the final vote	Alviina Alametsä, Alexander Alexandrov Yordanov, Maria Arena, Petras Auštrevičius, Traian Băsescu, Anna Bonfrisco, Reinhard Bütikofer, Fabio Massimo Castaldo, Susanna Ceccardi, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Katalin Cseh, Tanja Fajon, Anna Fotyga, Michael Gahler, Kinga Gál, Giorgos Georgiou, Sunčana Glavak, Raphaël Glucksmann, Klemen Grošelj, Bernard Guetta, Balázs Hidvéghi, Sandra Kalniete, Karol Karski, Stelios Kouloglou, Andrius Kubilius, Ilhan Kyuchyuk, Jean-Lin Lacapelle, David Lega, Miriam Lexmann, Nathalie Loiseau, Leopoldo López Gil, Antonio López-Istúriz White, Claudiu Manda, Lukas Mandl, Thierry Mariani, Pedro Marques, David McAllister, Vangelis Meimarakis, Sven Mikser, Francisco José Millán Mon, Javier Nart, Gheorghe-Vlad Nistor, Urmas Paet, Demetris Papadakis, Kostas Papadakis, Tonino Picula, Manu Pineda, Giuliano Pisapia, Thijs Reuten, Nacho Sánchez Amor, Isabel Santos, Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, Mounir Satouri, Andreas Schieder, Radosław Sikorski, Jordi Solé, Sergei Stanishev, Tineke Strik, Dominik Tarczyński, Hermann Tertsch, Dragoș Tudorache, Hilde Vautmans, Harald Vilimsky, Idoia Villanueva Ruiz, Viola Von Cramon-Taubadel, Thomas Waitz, Witold Jan Waszczykowski, Isabel Wiseler-Lima, Salima Yenbou, Željana Zovko
Substitutes present for the final vote	Corina Crețu, Angel Dzhambazki, Markéta Gregorová, Marisa Matias, Christian Sagartz

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

66	+
ECR	Angel Dzhambazki, Anna Fotyga, Karol Karski, Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, Dominik Tarczyński, Hermann Tertsch, Witold Jan Waszczykowski
ID	Anna Bonfrisco, Susanna Ceccardi
NI	Fabio Massimo Castaldo, Kinga Gál, Balázs Hidvéghi
PPE	Traian Băsescu, Michael Gahler, Sunčana Glavak, Sandra Kalniete, Andrius Kubilius, David Lega, Miriam Lexmann, Leopoldo López Gil, Antonio López-Istúriz White, David McAllister, Lukas Mandl, Francisco José Millán Mon, Gheorghe-Vlad Nistor, Christian Sagartz, Radosław Sikorski, Isabel Wiseler-Lima, Željana Zovko
Renew	Petras Auštrevičius, Katalin Cseh, Klemen Grošelj, Bernard Guetta, Ilhan Kyuchyuk, Nathalie Loiseau, Javier Nart, Urmas Paet, Dragoș Tudorache, Hilde Vautmans, Salima Yenbou
S&D	Maria Arena, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Corina Crețu, Tanja Fajon, Raphaël Glucksmann, Claudiu Manda, Pedro Marques, Sven Mikser, Demetris Papadakis, Tonino Picula, Giuliano Pisapia, Thijs Reuten, Nacho Sánchez Amor, Isabel Santos, Andreas Schieder, Sergei Stanishev
The Left	Stelios Kouloglou, Marisa Matias, Idoia Villanueva Ruiz
Verts/ALE	Alviina Alametsä, Reinhard Bütikofer, Markéta Gregorová, Mounir Satouri, Jordi Solé, Tineke Strik, Thomas Waitz

4	-
ID	Jean-Lin Lacapelle, Thierry Mariani, Harald Vilimsky
NI	Kostas Papadakis

5	0
PPE	Alexander Alexandrov Yordanov, Vangelis Meimarakis
The Left	Giorgos Georgiou, Manu Pineda
Verts/ALE	Viola Von Cramon-Taubadel

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention