



TEXTS ADOPTED

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2016 Report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

European Parliament resolution of 14 June 2017 on the 2016 Commission Report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2016/2310(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Presidency conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council of 19-20 June 2003 concerning the prospect of the Western Balkan countries joining the Union,
- having regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, of the other part¹,
- having regard to the Framework Agreement concluded at Ohrid and signed at Skopje on 13 August 2001 (Ohrid Framework Agreement, ‘the OFA’),
- having regard to the European Council’s decision of 16 December 2005 to grant the country the status of candidate for EU membership, to the European Council conclusions of June 2008, to the Council conclusions of December 2008, December 2012, December 2014 and December 2015, and to the Presidency conclusions of 13 December 2016, which received the support of the overwhelming majority of delegations and which reiterated unequivocal and strong commitment to the country’s EU accession process,
- having regard to the 13th meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Committee between the country and the Commission, held in Skopje on 15 June 2016,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 9 November 2016 entitled ‘EU Enlargement Policy’ (COM(2016)0715), accompanied by the Commission staff working document entitled ‘The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2016 Report’ (SWD(2016)0362),
- having regard to the June 2016 European Court of Auditors Special Report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,

¹ OJ L 84, 20.3.2004, p. 13.

- having regard to the Commission’s June 2015 Urgent Reform Priorities for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,
 - having regard to the Recommendations of the Senior Experts' Group on Systematic Rule of Law issues relating to the communications interception revealed in Spring 2015,
 - having regard to the political agreement (the so-called 'Pržino Agreement') reached between the four main political parties in Skopje on 2 June and 15 July 2015, and the four-party agreement on its implementation of 20 July and 31 August 2016,
 - having regard to the Final Declaration by the Chair of the Paris Western Balkans Summit of 4 July 2016 as well as the Recommendations of the Civil Society Organisations for the Paris Summit 2016,
 - having regard to the preliminary findings and conclusions and the final report of the OSCE/ODIHR concerning the early parliamentary elections of 11 December 2016,
 - having regard to UN Security Council resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993), as well as to UN General Assembly resolution 47/225 and the Interim Accord of 13 September 1995,
 - having regard to the judgment of the International Court of Justice on the Application of the Interim Accord of 13 September 1995,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on the country,
 - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A8-0055/2017),
- A. whereas, after twice being postponed, early parliamentary elections in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were held on 11 December 2016 in an ordinary and calm atmosphere, in accordance with international standards and in line with OSCE/ODIHR recommendations; whereas they proceeded without major incidents, were generally well-administered and the voter turnout was high;
- B. whereas reforms and accession preparations are being hampered by political polarisation, deep mutual mistrust and a lack of a genuine dialogue between the parties; whereas backsliding in some important areas can be continuously observed; whereas democracy and the rule of law have been constantly challenged, particularly as the result of state capture affecting the functioning of democratic institutions and key areas of society;
- C. whereas, on 27 April 2017, Talat Xhaferi was elected as new Speaker of the Macedonian Parliament; whereas, on 17 May 2017, the President of the Republic of Macedonia entrusted the mandate to form a new government to SDSM leader Zoran Zaev; whereas, on 31 May 2017, the new government led by Prime Minister Zoran Zaev was voted in by the Macedonian Parliament;
- D. whereas some of the key issues in the reform process include reform of the judiciary, public administration and media, youth unemployment and a review of the implementation of the OFA;

- E. whereas a serious commitment by all political forces is required for the country to continue to pursue its EU integration and Euro-Atlantic path; whereas a new government needs to adopt and fully implement robust reforms marked by tangible results, particularly as regards the areas of the rule of law, justice, corruption, fundamental rights, home affairs and good neighbourly relations;
- F. whereas there is common understanding between the Commission, the Council and the Parliament that the maintenance of the positive recommendation to open accession negotiations with the country remains dependent/conditional on progress in the implementation of the Pržino Agreement and substantial progress in the implementation of the Urgent Reform Priorities;
- G. whereas the Council has been blocking progress due to the unresolved name issue with Greece; whereas bilateral issues should not be used as a pretext to obstruct the swift start of negotiations with the EU;
- H. whereas bilateral disputes should not be used to obstruct the EU accession process, nor the opening of accession negotiations, but should be duly addressed in a constructive spirit and in compliance with EU and UN standards; whereas all efforts should be pursued to maintain good neighbourly and inter-ethnic relations;
- I. whereas (potential) candidate countries are judged on their own merits and the speed and quality of the necessary reforms determine the timetable for accession; whereas the opening of accession negotiations should be guaranteed upon the fulfilment of required conditions; whereas the country has been considered for many years as one of the most advanced EU candidate countries in terms of alignment with the *acquis*;
- J. whereas the EU accession process is a major incentive for further reforms, particularly with regard to the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, the fight against corruption, and media freedom; whereas regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations are essential elements of the enlargement process, the Stabilisation and Association Process and the country's accession process;
- K. whereas on 20 July and 31 August 2016 leaders of the four main political parties reached an agreement on the implementation of the Pržino Agreement, which included setting 11 December 2016 as the date for early parliamentary elections and declaring their support for the work of the Special Prosecutor; whereas they also reiterated their commitment to implement the 'Urgent Reform Priorities';
- L. whereas the recent political crisis has illustrated the lack of an effective system of checks and balances in the Macedonian institutions and the need to increase transparency and public accountability;
- M. whereas fighting organised crime and corruption remains fundamental to countering criminal infiltration of the political, legal and economic systems;
- 1. Welcomes the formation of a new government on 31 May 2017; urges all political parties to act in a spirit of reconciliation, in the common interest of all citizens and to work with the government on restoring confidence in the country and its institutions, including through the full implementation of the Pržino Agreement and Urgent Reform Priorities;

2. Welcomes the respect for fundamental freedoms shown at the early elections on 11 December 2016, which were well administered, were held in a transparent and inclusive manner and proceeded without major incidents; notes that the OSCE/ODIHR considered the elections competitive; welcomes the fact that all political parties accepted its results in the interest of domestic stability and underlines their responsibility to ensure that there is no backsliding into political crisis; calls on all parties to refrain from any obstruction of the effective functioning of the parliament; urges the new government to swiftly proceed with the necessary reforms, to ensure the country's Euro-Atlantic integration and to advance its European perspective for the benefit of citizens; considers cross-party and inter-ethnic cooperation essential for addressing pressing domestic and EU-related challenges, and for maintaining the positive recommendation to open EU accession negotiations;
3. Welcomes the improvements in the electoral process, including the legal framework, voters' list and media coverage; welcomes the fact that civil society representatives observed the elections in a large majority of the polling stations; calls on the competent authorities to effectively address the alleged irregularities and shortcomings, including voter intimidation, vote buying, misuse of administrative resources, political pressure on the media, as well as confrontational language and verbal attacks on journalists, also in view of the local elections in May 2017; urges the competent authorities to address the recommendations made by the OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission and to establish a credible track record of effective scrutiny of political party and electoral campaign financing; stresses the need for greater transparency and further de-politicisation of the work of the electoral administration in order to increase the public's trust in future elections;
4. Considers it important to conduct a population census (the last census was conducted in 2002), provided that there is a country-wide consensus on the methodology to be applied, in order to obtain an updated and realistic picture of the demographics of the Macedonian population, to better meet the needs of – and offer services to – Macedonian citizens, and to further update the voters' list and minimise any irregularities and shortcomings in the future;
5. Expects the new government, as a first priority, in cooperation with other parties, to accelerate EU-related reforms; reiterates its support for the opening of accession negotiations, conditional on the progress of the implementation of the Pržino Agreement to ensure its full, tangible and sustainable implementation and substantial progress in the implementation of the Urgent Reform Priorities on systemic reforms; calls on the Council to address the issue of the accession negotiations at its earliest convenience; continues to be convinced that negotiations can generate much-needed reforms, create a new dynamic, revitalise the European perspective and positively influence the resolution of bilateral disputes so as not to hamper the EU accession process;
6. Underlines the strategic importance of further progress in the EU accession process and calls again for political will and ownership to be displayed by all the parties in fully implementing the Urgent Reform Priorities and the Pržino agreement; underlines that implementation of the Pržino agreement is vital also beyond the elections to ensure political stability and sustainability in the future; calls on the Commission to assess, at its earliest convenience but before the end of 2017, the country's progress on implementation and to report back to Parliament and to the Council; while recalling that

long overdue reforms need to be launched and implemented, supports the continuation of the High Level Accession Dialogue (HLAD) for systematically assisting the country in this endeavour; regrets that no meeting was held under HLAD and that there was little progress on meeting previous targets; draws attention to the potential negative political, security and socio-economic consequences of further delays in the country's Euro-Atlantic integration process; further calls on the Commission and the EEAS to increase the visibility of EU-funded projects in the country in order to bring the EU closer to the citizens of the country;

7. Underlines the significant progress the country has made in the process of EU integration and emphasises the negative consequences of further delaying the process of integration, including the threat to the credibility of the EU's enlargement policy and the risk of instability in the region;
8. Points out that the current challenges facing the European Union (Brexit, migration, radicalism, etc.) should not hinder the enlargement process, but rather that these challenges have demonstrated the need to fully integrate the Western Balkans into EU structures in order to enhance and deepen partnership and overcome international crises;
9. Welcomes the high level of legislative alignment with the *acquis communautaire* and acknowledges the priority given to the effective implementation and enforcement of existing legal and policy frameworks, as in the case of countries already engaged in the accession negotiations;
10. Congratulates the country for continuing to fulfil its commitments under the SAA; calls on the Council to adopt the Commission's 2009 proposal to move to the second stage of the SAA, in line with the relevant provisions;
11. Urges all parties to demonstrate the political will and responsibility to overcome the divisive political environment, polarisation and lack of a culture of compromise and to re-engage in dialogue; emphasises again the key role of parliament in the democratic development of the country and as the forum for political dialogue and representation; calls for its oversight functions to be strengthened and for limits to be placed on the practice of frequent legislative changes to laws and the use of shortened procedures for adoption, without sufficient consultation or impact assessment; urges the smooth operation of the parliamentary committees on the interception of communications and on security and counterintelligence, and their unhindered access to the necessary data and testimonies in order to provide credible parliamentary control over relevant services; acknowledges the constructive role civil society plays in supporting and improving democratic processes;
12. Notes some progress in reforming public administration including the steps to implement the new legal framework on human resources management; calls for further commitment to implement the Commission recommendations; remains concerned about the politicised public administration and that civil servants are subject to political pressure; urges the new government to demonstrate a strong political commitment to enhancing professionalism, merit, neutrality and independence at all levels by implementing the new merit-based recruitment and appraisal procedure; stresses the need to complete the 2017-2022 public administration reform strategy, including by making sufficient budget allocations for its implementation, and to strengthen relevant administrative capacity; calls for the incoming government to establish transparent and

effective lines of accountability between and within institutions; recommends that all communities be fairly represented at all levels of the public administration;

13. Recommends that the incoming government develop a comprehensive e-governance strategy accompanied by the further development of e-services for citizens and businesses in order to reduce the bureaucratic burden for the state, citizens and business; emphasises that e-governance and e-services would enhance the country's economic performance and increase the transparency and efficiency of the public administration and services; stresses the right of citizens to access public information and calls for further efforts to ensure that this right is not impeded in any way; encourages the search for innovative e-solutions to ensure easy access to public information and to reduce related bureaucracy;
14. Regrets the continuous backsliding in the reform of the judiciary, which should be encouraged to function independently; deplors recurrent political interference in its work, including in the appointment and promotion of judges and prosecutors, as well as the lack of accountability and cases of selective justice; calls once again on the competent authorities to address effectively the outstanding issues as identified in the 'Urgent Reform Priorities' and to demonstrate the political will to progress in judicial reform including by improving, in law and in practice, transparency in the appointment and promotion procedures and by reducing the length of court proceedings; acknowledges that some efforts have been made to improve transparency; calls, furthermore, on the authorities to ensure the professionalism of the Judicial Council and the Prosecutors Council and the functional independence of the justice system as a whole;
15. Reiterates the importance of a thorough and independent investigation, without hindrance, into allegations of wrong-doing brought to the fore by the wiretaps and the related failures of oversight; recalls the importance of the mandate and the work of both the Special Prosecutor and the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry to look into legal accountability and political responsibility respectively; notes that the Special Prosecutor has raised the first criminal indictments concerning wrongdoings arising from the wiretaps;
16. Is concerned about the political attacks against, and the administrative and judicial obstructions to, the work of the Special Prosecutor's Office (SPO) and the lack of cooperation from other institutions; reminds the criminal courts that do not respond to official requests from the SPO that they have a legal obligation to assist the SPO; considers it essential for the democratic process that the SPO is able to fulfil all its functions and to carry out thorough investigations in full autonomy, without impediment and with the necessary means; calls for the SPO to be given full support and the conditions and time necessary to complete its important work; calls for an end to obstructions in the courts for referring evidence to the Special Prosecutor, and for support for amendments to the law to ensure it has autonomous authority for witness protection with respect to the cases for which it is responsible; strongly believes that the outcomes of the investigations constitute an important step towards restoring trust in national institutions; highlights, furthermore, the need to adopt amendments to the Law on Witness Protection;
17. Remains concerned that corruption continues to be a serious problem and that combating corruption is being undermined by political interference; highlights the need

for strong political will to tackle it; stresses the need to strengthen the independence of the police, the prosecution and the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC); calls for action to improve transparency and to ensure the merit-based selection and appointment of SCPC members; calls, as a matter of urgency, for efforts to be made to ensure the effective prevention and punishment of conflicts of interest and to establish a credible track record on high-level corruption, including the implementation of the legal framework for the protection of whistle-blowers in line with European standards, the Urgent Reform Priorities and the Venice Commission recommendations; encourages once again independent CSOs and the media to bring to light corruption and support independent and impartial investigations; calls on the authorities to support the work of the Ombudsman with adequate staffing and budgetary measures;

18. Is concerned about the merging of media, political and government activities, particularly regarding public spending; strongly condemns the existence of unlawful economic, political and family ties in relation to the spending of public funds; calls on the government to adopt a legislative framework that regulates conflicts of interest and makes public the assets of persons occupying high state positions as an additional measure to fight corruption;
19. Welcomes the fact that the legislative framework and strategies for fighting organised crime are in place; welcomes the dismantling of criminal networks and routes related to trafficking in human beings and drugs and calls for a further stepping up of the efforts to fight organised crime; encourages further improvement of cooperation between law enforcement agencies both within the country and with neighbouring countries and the strengthening of the powers and resources of the courts; considers it essential to further develop the law enforcement capacity to investigate financial crimes and confiscate assets;
20. Appreciates the continued efforts to fight Islamic radicalisation and foreign terrorist fighters; welcomes the adoption of the 2013-2019 strategy to fight terrorism, which also defines the concepts of violent extremism, radicalisation, prevention and reintegration; calls for its implementation through more cooperation between security agencies and civil society organisations (CSOs), religious leaders, local communities and other state institutions in the education, health and social services sectors in addressing the different stages of radicalisation and developing tools for reintegration and rehabilitation; further calls for continued monitoring of returning foreign fighters by security services, their proper reintegration into society and a constant exchange of information with the authorities of the EU and neighbouring countries;
21. Is concerned about signals coming from CSOs referring to the deterioration of the climate in which they operate; remains concerned about radical public attacks on CSOs and foreign representatives by politicians and the media; acknowledges and encourages the important role played by CSOs in monitoring, supporting and improving democratic processes, including the electoral process, and ensuring checks and balances; is concerned about limited government commitment and insufficient cooperation with CSOs at all levels; highlights the importance of a regular and constructive dialogue and cooperation with CSOs and urges the competent authorities to include them in policymaking in a regular and structured manner; calls on the authorities not to discriminate against CSOs on any grounds such as political affiliation, religious views or ethnic composition; believes that freedom of assembly and association should not be denied to any group of people without serious justification;

22. Encourages the authorities to resume work on the interrupted census which would provide accurate population statistics that could serve as a basis for government development programmes and adequate budget planning;
23. Reminds the government and political parties of their responsibilities in shaping, by law and in practice, a culture of inclusion and tolerance; welcomes the adoption of the national strategy for equality and non-discrimination 2016-2020; is concerned about impartiality and the independence of the Commission for Protection from Discrimination and calls for a transparent selection process for its members; reiterates its condemnation of hate speech against discriminated groups; is concerned that intolerance, discrimination and attacks against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people persists; reiterates its call for the Anti-Discrimination Law to be aligned with the *acquis* as regards discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation; underlines again the need to combat prejudice and discrimination against the Roma, and to facilitate their integration and their access to the education system and the labour market; is concerned about the inhumane physical conditions and overcrowding in prisons, despite a significant increase in the prison budget; calls for the Ombudsman's recommendations to be respected;
24. Calls for further efforts to promote gender equality and increase the participation of women in political life and employment, to improve their socio-economic situation and to strengthen women's rights on the whole; calls on the competent authorities to improve the implementation of the Law on Equal Opportunities, to tackle the underrepresentation of women in key decision-making positions at all levels and to strengthen the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms to advance equality between men and women; urges the competent authorities to make sufficient budget allocations for its implementation; is concerned about the lack of women's access to some basic health services and the persistently high infant mortality rate;
25. Urges the government to take measures to review the Law on Prevention and Protection against Domestic Violence and other relevant laws, in order to provide appropriate protection to all victims of domestic violence and gender-based violence and to improve support services to victims of domestic violence, including an adequate number of shelters; further urges the government to ensure that cases of domestic violence are thoroughly investigated and perpetrators prosecuted, and to continue to raise awareness about domestic violence;
26. Reiterates that the interethnic situation remains fragile; urges all political parties and CSOs to actively promote an inclusive and tolerant multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society and to strengthen coexistence and dialogue; believes that specific measures are needed in order to achieve social cohesion among the various ethnic, national and religious communities; reminds the government and party leaders of their commitment to fully implement the OFA in an inclusive and transparent manner, to complete its overdue review without further delay, including policy recommendations, and to ensure a sufficient budget for its implementation; condemns any form of irredentism and any attempt to disintegrate different social groups; stresses the importance of starting the long-awaited census without further delay;
27. Calls on the Commission to make further efforts to support a true reconciliation process in the region, notably through support for cultural projects dealing with the recent past and promoting a common and shared understanding of history and a public and political

culture of tolerance, inclusion and reconciliation;

28. Reiterates that the authorities and civil society should take appropriate measures to achieve historical reconciliation in order to overcome the divide between and within different ethnic and national groups, including citizens of Bulgarian identity;
29. Urges the government to send clear signals to the public and the media that discrimination on the basis of national identity is not tolerated in the country, including in relation to the justice system, media, employment and social opportunities; underlines the importance of these actions for the integration of the various ethnic communities and the stability and European integration of the country;
30. Encourages the authorities to retrieve the relevant Yugoslav secret service archives from Serbia; takes the view that transparent handling of the totalitarian past, including the opening-up of the secret service archives, is a step towards further democratisation, accountability and institutional strength;
31. Reiterates the importance of media freedom and independence as one of the core EU values and a cornerstone of any democracy; remains concerned over freedom of expression and the media, the use of hate speech, the cases of intimidation and self-censorship, systemic political interference in and pressure on editorial policies, the absence of investigative, objective and accurate reporting, as well as unbalanced reporting of government activities; reiterates its call for reporting of a variety of viewpoints through the mainstream media, particularly the public service broadcaster;
32. Calls on the new government to ensure that intimidation or violence against journalists is prevented and duly investigated and that those responsible be brought to justice; underlines the need for the sustainability and political and financial autonomy of the public service broadcast in order to ensure its financial and editorial independence, and the right of access to impartial information; calls for inclusive media interest representation bodies; calls for the establishment of a professional code of conduct accepted by both public and private media; encourages joint work between government officials, CSOs and journalist organisations on the media reform;
33. Remains concerned that the political situation represents a serious risk to the Macedonian economy; continues to be concerned about weak contract enforcement, the size of the informal economy and the difficulty in obtaining access to finance; stresses that the sizeable shadow economy is an important obstacle to business; stresses the need to take measures to enhance competitiveness and job creation in the private sector, and calls on the competent authorities to also address judicial efficiency;
34. Welcomes the maintenance of macro-economic stability, the reduction of the unemployment rate and the government's continued commitment to promoting growth and employment through market-based economic policies, but is concerned about the sustainability of public debt and the fact that unemployment still remains high with very low labour market participation, especially among young people, women and the disabled; further urges competent authorities to tackle long-term and structural unemployment, to promote economic policy cooperation, to better align education with labour market demands and to develop a targeted strategy on how to better integrate young people and women into the labour market; is concerned about the outflow of highly educated young professionals and strongly calls on the government to develop

programmes to allow highly educated young professionals to return and participate in the political and decision-making processes; calls for action to improve fiscal discipline and transparency and increase budget planning capacity; encourages the principle of balanced budgets; notes that a reliable and predictable regulatory environment for businesses leads to increased macro-economic stability and growth; calls for proper consultation with all stakeholders in this regard;

35. Welcomes the progress made in modernising transport, energy and telecommunications networks and, in particular, the efforts to complete Corridor X¹; in view of the importance of railway links in the framework of a sustainable system of transport, welcomes the government's intention to upgrade or construct railway links from Skopje to the capitals of the neighbouring countries and calls for greater progress, especially in the finalisation of the railway and road connections within Corridor VIII²;
36. Commends the good level of preparation in the field of electronic communications and the information society; calls for further advancement in the area of cyber security and underlines the need to develop and adopt a national cyber security strategy in order to increase cyber resilience;
37. Is concerned about the significant shortcomings in the field of the environment, in particular in the area of industrial pollution and air and water pollution; notes that the current condition of the water-supply system is generally poor, resulting in high water loss and water quality issues; stresses the need to develop and implement a sustainable waste policy and calls for a comprehensive policy and strategy on climate action to be developed that is in line with the EU 2030 framework for climate policy, and for the ratification and implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement;
38. Welcomes the country's constructive role in regional cooperation, particularly in the Western Balkans Six initiative and connectivity agenda; notes, however, that transport and energy infrastructure linkages to regional neighbours and the connection to the TEN-T network are still limited; welcomes the progress made on the security of supply, as well as in the area of electricity transmission interconnectors and gas interconnections; notes the agreement signed with the Western Balkans countries on the development of a regional electricity market; highlights the need to make progress on opening up the electricity market and to develop competition in the gas and energy market, working towards the unbundling of utilities in line with the EU's Third Energy Package; calls for substantial improvements as regards energy efficiency, the production of renewable energy and the fight against climate change; calls for the ratification of the Paris climate agreement;
39. Urges the authorities to strengthen the administrative and financing capacities in order to ensure a transparent, efficient and effective public procurement regime, prevent any irregularities and implement EU funds properly and in a timely manner, and to provide, at the same time, detailed regular reports on the programming and use of Community funds; notes with concern that the Commission has yet again reduced the IPA financial assistance by approximately EUR 27 million as a consequence of the lack of political

¹ Corridor X is one of the pan-European transport corridors and runs from Salzburg (Austria) to Thessaloniki (Greece).

² Corridor VIII is one of the pan-European transport corridors and runs from Durrës (Albania) to Varna (Bulgaria). It also passes through Skopje.

commitment to deliver on reforms in public financial management; calls on the Commission to include information about IPA support for the country and the effectiveness of implemented measures in its reports, in particular the IPA support allocated to implementation of the key priorities and relevant projects;

40. Commends the country for its constructive role and cooperation and its tremendous efforts in addressing the challenges of the migration crisis, thus substantially contributing to the security and stability of the EU; in this regard, calls on the Commission to provide the country with all necessary tools to alleviate the crisis; recommends further measures and actions in compliance with international humanitarian law to improve its asylum system, to ensure the necessary capacity to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings and in migrants, including cooperation agreements with neighbouring States in the fight against crime, and to ensure effective border management;
41. Notes that the country lies on the so-called 'Western Balkans route' and that approximately 600 000 refugees and migrants, including vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly, have so far travelled through it on their way to Europe; urges its authorities to ensure that migrants and refugees applying for asylum in the country or traveling through its territory, are treated in accordance with international and EU law, including the 1951 Refugee Conventions and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights;
42. Calls on the Commission to continue the work on migration-related issues with all the countries of the Western Balkans, in order to make sure that European and international norms and standards are followed;
43. Emphasises the importance of regional cooperation as a tool to drive forward the process of EU integration, and commends the country's constructive efforts and proactive contributions in promoting bilateral relations with all countries in the region;
44. Believes that regional cooperation is an essential element in the EU accession process, bringing stability and prosperity to the region, and should be a priority for the government; welcomes the country's continued constructive role and proactive contributions towards promoting bilateral, regional and international cooperation, as well as its participation in civilian and military crisis management operations; commends the increased alignment with EU foreign policy (73%); calls on Macedonian authorities to also align with the EU's restrictive measures against Russia following the illegal annexation of Crimea; reiterates the importance of finalising the negotiations on a treaty on friendship and good neighbourliness with Bulgaria; calls on the authorities to respect the political, social and cultural rights of citizens of the country who identify themselves as Bulgarians;
45. Encourages the establishment of joint expert committees on history and education with neighbouring countries, with the aim of contributing to an objective, fact-based interpretation of history, strengthening academic cooperation and promoting positive attitudes in young people towards their neighbours;
46. Welcomes the tangible results from the initiative for confidence-building measures between this country and Greece, which could contribute to a better understanding and stronger bilateral relations, paving the way for a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue, and acknowledges positive developments regarding their implementation;

underlines the importance of avoiding gestures, controversial actions and statements which can have a negative impact on good neighbourly relations; strongly reiterates its invitation to the Vice-President/High Representative (VP/HR) and the Commission to develop new initiatives to overcome the remaining differences and to work, in cooperation with the two countries and the UN Special Representative, on a mutually acceptable solution on the name issue and to report back to Parliament thereon;

47. Welcomes the activities carried out in the framework of the Berlin Process, which demonstrate strong political support for the European perspective of Western Balkan countries; points out the importance of this process for the promotion of the economic development of the countries in the region through investments in core networks and bilateral projects in the fields of infrastructure, the economy and interconnectivity; reiterates the importance of active participation in the regional youth-related initiatives, such as the Regional Youth Cooperation Office of the Western Balkans; welcomes the establishment of the Western Balkans Fund, and urges the Commission to take into account the initiatives and projects proposed;
48. Commends the country on its chairmanship of the CEI when the focus throughout 2015 was on economic cooperation and business opportunities, infrastructure and general economic development, including rural development and tourism, and on bridging macro-regions;
49. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Vice-President/High Representative, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the government and parliament of the country.