



TEXTS ADOPTED

P9_TA(2019)0050

Opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania

European Parliament resolution of 24 October 2019 on opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania (2019/2883(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 28 June 2018, which endorsed the conclusions on enlargement and the stabilisation and association process adopted by the Council on 26 June 2018, laying a clear path towards the opening of accession negotiations in June 2019,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 18 June 2019, in which it decided to revert, no later than October 2019, to the issue of the Commission's recommendations to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania,
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 17 and 18 October 2019, in which it decided to revert to the issue of enlargement before the EU-Western Balkans summit in Zagreb in May 2020,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 29 May 2019 on EU enlargement policy (COM(2019)0260), accompanied by the Commission staff working documents entitled 'Albania 2019 Report' (SWD(2019)0215) and 'North Macedonia 2019 Report' (SWD(2019)0218),
- having regard to its previous resolutions on Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in particular those of 15 February 2017¹ and 29 November 2018² on the 2016 and 2018 Commission Reports on Albania, and those of 14 June 2017³ and 29 November 2018⁴ on the 2016 and 2018 Commission Reports on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia/North Macedonia,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 6 February 2018 entitled 'A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans' (COM(2018)0065),

¹ OJ C 252, 18.7.2018, p. 122.

² Texts adopted, P8_TA(2018)0481.

³ OJ C 331, 18.9.2018, p. 88.

⁴ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2018)0480.

- having regard to Albania’s accession to NATO in 2009 and the fact that North Macedonia is currently on its way to becoming the 30th member of NATO,
 - 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 joint letter of 3 October 2019 by Presidents Tusk, Sassoli and Juncker, and President-elect Von der Leyen on the opening of accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania,
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 16 October 2013 entitled ‘Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2013-2014’ (COM(2013)0700),
 - having regard to the Presidency conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council of 19 and 20 June 2003 concerning the prospect of the Western Balkan countries joining the European Union,
 - having regard to the Berlin Process, launched on 28 August 2014,
 - having regard to the Final Agreement for the settlement of the differences as described in the UN Security Council resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993), the termination of the Interim Accord of 1995 and the establishment of a Strategic Partnership on 17 June 2018 between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, also known as the Prespa Agreement,
 - having regard to the European Council’s decision of 16 December 2005 to grant North Macedonia the status of candidate for EU membership and the European Council decision of 26-27 June 2014 to grant Albania candidate country status,
 - having regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAAs) between the European Communities and their Member States and the two countries in question, Albania and North Macedonia,
 - 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 Rule 132(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas in 2003, the Thessaloniki European Council underlined its support for the future integration of the Western Balkan countries into European structures and stated that their ultimate membership of the Union is a high priority for the EU and that the Balkans will be an integral part of a unified Europe;
 - B. whereas at the EU-Western Balkans Summit of 17 May 2017, the EU reaffirmed its unequivocal support for the prospect of EU membership for the Western Balkans;
 - C. whereas the prospect of EU membership has been a fundamental incentive for reforms in the Western Balkan countries; whereas the enlargement process has played a decisive role in the stabilisation of the Western Balkans, which is considered a region of strategic importance to the EU;

- D. whereas political consensus and wide public support for the EU accession process exists in both North Macedonia and Albania;
- E. whereas regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations are essential for the countries' progress on their path towards EU accession;
- F. whereas each candidate country is judged individually on its own merits, and it is the speed and quality of reforms that should determine the timetable for accession and the pace of negotiations;
- G. whereas Albania applied for EU membership in 2009 and was granted candidate country status in 2014; whereas in 2016 the Commission recommended that accession negotiations be opened with Albania; whereas North Macedonia applied for membership in 2004 and became a candidate country in 2005; whereas the Commission has, since 2009, repeatedly recommended that formal accession negotiations be opened with North Macedonia;
- H. whereas this represents the third time the European Council has shown its inability to reach a positive decision on enlargement after the June 2018 and 2019 European Councils; whereas the European Council concluded that it would revert to the issue of enlargement before the EU-Western Balkans summit in Zagreb in May 2020;
- I. whereas North Macedonia, under its former name in August 2017, signed the so-called 'Friendship Treaty' with Bulgaria, which put an end to bilateral controversies and brought the two countries closer through an EU-oriented partnership, followed by the Prespa Agreement with Greece;
- J. whereas good progress has been made in judicial reform in Albania aimed at increasing the independence, accountability, professionalism and efficiency of the country's judicial institutions and aimed at improving people's trust in judicial bodies; whereas the reforms are to be considered the most comprehensive efforts in this area also compared to what all other countries in the region will have to accomplish on their path towards EU membership;
- K. whereas snap elections were announced in North Macedonia in response to the postponement of the decision on opening negotiations with the country;
 - 1. Expresses its deep disappointment at the EU's failure to agree on opening accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania due to the blocking of France, Denmark and the Netherlands, since both countries have made considerable efforts and meet the EU's requirements for opening accession negotiations;
 - 2. Commends North Macedonia for its historic and satisfactory settlement of difficult, open bilateral issues and the promotion of good neighbourly relations, notably through the Prespa Agreement with Greece, and the Treaty on Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation with Bulgaria; calls on the Council to take into consideration the positive messages of these agreements and the counter-effects of its decision on political stability, regional cooperation and peaceful co-existence, and furthermore compliments the Republic of North Macedonia for its contribution to peace in the Balkans and for setting a shining example of how to find peaceful solutions to longstanding disputes; calls for the continuation of the Jean Monnet Dialogues with the Assembly of North Macedonia as a key instrument of support;

3. Welcomes the fact that Albania has demonstrated its determination to advance on the EU reform agenda and has delivered tangible and sustained results, and also welcomes the judiciary reforms carried out by Albania; fully endorses the Commission's recommendation on Albania in recognition of these encouraging reform efforts; considers that a swift opening of the screening process and accession talks would sustain and increase the momentum of reform; considers that the opening of negotiations would constitute a powerful catalyst for implementing reforms and consolidating democratic institutions and would contribute to enhancing EU scrutiny, accountability and full respect for the rights of minorities in both Albania and North Macedonia;
4. Stresses that such a non-decision is a strategic mistake and has a detrimental effect on the EU's credibility given that the integration of eligible countries helps the EU to uphold its international role and protect its interests, while progressing on the path towards EU accession also has a transformative effect on the candidate countries themselves; furthermore states that the EU's enlargement policy has been the most effective foreign policy instrument of the Union and that its further dismantlement might lead to an increasingly unstable situation in the EU's immediate neighbourhood;
5. Notes that a possible reform of the enlargement process should not hinder those countries which have already met the requirements for opening accession negotiations and furthermore notes that candidate countries need to be assessed on the basis of their own merit based on objective criteria, not considerations of domestic political agendas in individual Member States, and that it is the speed and quality of reforms that determine the timetable for accession;
6. Recalls the renewed consensus on Enlargement approved by the European Council in December 2006 and subsequently endorsed in the European Council conclusions of June 2016;
7. Highlights that the EU's failure to open accession negotiations has resulted in snap elections being called in North Macedonia, resulting in a loss of credibility for those who have made compromises; considers that this sends a negative message for possible candidate countries regarding good neighbourly relations; notes with concern that this could allow other foreign actors, whose activity might not be in line with EU values and interests, to engage more closely with both North Macedonia and Albania;
8. Commends the conclusions of the Leaders Meeting of North Macedonia on 20 October 2019, which reaffirm the country's commitment to the European accession process and stress that there is no alternative for North Macedonia;
9. Stresses that this decision sends a warning signal to other candidate countries and potential candidate countries in the Western Balkans and creates openings for other influences, and that it could slow down or even completely halt the implementation of pro-European reforms in other accession countries;
10. Recalls that the youth in the region have high expectations as regards EU accession and believes that a future without a clear perspective could lead to migration from the region;
11. Regrets that this decision undermines the efforts made by the European Parliament in the process of enlargement and the Strategy for the Western Balkans;

12. Regrets that the Member States were not able to reach a unanimous decision on the opening of negotiations; calls on the Member States to show responsibility towards Albania and North Macedonia and to take a unanimous positive decision on the opening of negotiations at their next meeting, while bearing in mind the consequences of non-action;
13. Considers that the incoming Commission should immediately take stock of the enlargement policy, taking into account the effects of the Council's recent decision, while emphasising the advantages of enlargement both for candidate countries and for Member States; believes, furthermore, that the Commission should re-evaluate and amend its February 2018 Strategy for the Western Balkans accordingly;
14. Reiterates that, pursuant to Article 49 TEU, any state in Europe may apply to become a member of the European Union provided that it adheres to the Copenhagen criteria and the principles of democracy, respects fundamental freedoms and human and minority rights, and upholds the rule of law;
15. Calls for Parliament to further step up its democracy support activities (Jean Monnet Dialogues and capacity building) in the region in order to ensure that parliaments play their full role as engines for democratic reform and that they deliver on the European aspirations of the citizens of the region;
16. Calls for Parliament, in this respect, and in response to the deadlock in the European Council, to convene a regional parliamentary dialogue with the leadership of the parliaments of the Western Balkans, in order to develop a strategy on the role of parliaments in driving forward the EU reform agenda and in delivering concrete measures that meet the European aspirations of the people of the region;
17. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the EU Member States, and the Governments and Parliaments of North Macedonia and Albania and all other accession countries.