



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Union

Skopje, 19 April 2011

**Marking 4th meeting of EU – the former Yugoslav Republic of
Macedonia Civil Society Joint Consultative Committee,
Skopje 19 April, 2011**

Venue: Holiday Inn Hotel Skopje
Meeting room: Millennium 2

Speaking points

Ambassador
Mr. Peter SØRENSEN
Head of the European Union Delegation

Dear Deputy Prime Minister Naumovski; Dear Ambassadors; Dear Co-chairs Ms Grupcheva and Ms Raunemaa; Dear members of the Joint Consultative Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is with great pleasure that I join in the inaugural session of this 4th meeting of the civil society Joint Consultative Committee. The European Economic and Social Committees (EESC) through its links with economic and social interest groups is a vital partner for all – not least due to its declared commitment to European integration. The EESC External Relations Section established Joint Consultative Committees play an important role in the promotion of the values on which European integration is founded. It is with those facts in mind I am particularly pleased to be here today.

Today's meeting takes place at a very important stage in the EU accession process for the country. As we know, the European Commission recommended already in 2009 start of the negotiation accession talks. The Commission believed at that time – and they currently do – that the country is ready to engage in a higher level of integration with Europe. Through their reiterated recommendations to start negotiation, the Commission confirmed that the country has sufficiently met the political criteria – but they also underline that further efforts are needed in most areas.

At this stage, it is vital that the momentum of the reforms is maintained – and in some areas even accelerated. The last Progress Report pointed to the need for further progress in areas such as: (i) political dialogue, (ii) judiciary and public administration reform, (iii) fight against corruption, (iv) freedom of expression and media, and (v) implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

These are issues that we in the EU Delegation continue to monitor and to keep an eye on in view of this year's report as well. Obviously, the upcoming elections can end up some attention from the day-to-day work on some of these issues. However, the more the reason for us to expect good, solid, free and fair elections that will cement the continued fulfilment of the political criteria, which is so ever important for the accession process.

A lesson learned from the previous rounds of enlargement is that the sheer scale of the reform process means that no one can shoulder the burden alone. Therefore, civil society organisations have an important role to play as a "bridge" between people and national institutions. Thematic groups of NGOs representatives can be crucial in helping legislators towards appropriate decisions. Consequently, the Civil Society Joint Consultative Committees is a perfect forum where important accession challenges and experiences can be discussed.

The social dialogue is one of the main challenges that the country faces in its EU accession path. The social partners must be seen as indispensable players and partners and must be fully integrated into the political dialogue. In the last EC Progress Report the establishment and working of the Economic and Social Council was welcomed. However, the Progress Report also clearly states that more efforts

are required to ensure adequate and effective participation of the social partners in the policy development process. This is a challenge for all political players involved.

As the Deputy Prime Minister said, I also personally believe that in the current economic situation we need more than ever to reinforce the role of social partners and strengthen the social dialogue. The countries making the best progress at this moment are those where social partnership appears to be strongest. They seem to have unlocked the secret behind the establishment of a "culture of partnership" between national institutions, business and trade unions – a partnership that can bring about prosperity for all citizens, making "jobs and growth" a reality.

Therefore, it is important to reflect on these sorts of issues. I hope that your discussions today will be lively and fruitful – and I will look forward to read your joint proposals that the Joint Consultative Committee might conclude after your debate on issues of common interest.

Thank you for your attention.