



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

**Štefan Füle**

European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy

## **Presentation of the spring reports**

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Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Enlarged Bureau of the Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET) of the European Parliament / Strasbourg

**16 April 2013**

Chairman, Honourable Members,

Last October, when I addressed the formal session of this Committee on the occasion of the adoption of the 2012 Enlargement Package, I spoke about the key challenges for enlargement - putting the rule of law at its centre, addressing bilateral issues and dealing with economic difficulties. I also spoke about the hard and permanent work and innovative approaches that would be needed to maintain momentum for reforms and for enlargement.

Subsequently, the December General Affairs Council set out a positive agenda for enlargement, holding out the prospect of decisions of the European Council in June to open accession negotiations with Serbia and with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as well as a decision to open negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Kosovo.

In the meantime, there has been no lack of hard work by all concerned and innovative approaches have helped to maintain momentum.

In response to December Council conclusions, the Commission had foreseen to adopt today:

- Joint Reports of the High Representative and the Commission on Serbia and Kosovo;
- Commission proposal for negotiating directives for Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Kosovo; and
- Commission report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The documents concerning Serbia and Kosovo were discussed but not yet adopted today, since a further meeting of the European Union-facilitated dialogue has just been announced by the High Representative for tomorrow, Wednesday. We are confident that this dialogue on Prime Ministers' level will result in a clear agreement.

This is in the strategic interests of both Serbia and Kosovo, and of the entire Western Balkans region, as well as of the European Union as a whole. It is time for Serbia and Kosovo to move on from the past and look ahead to a common European future. We hope the two leaderships will seize the historical opportunity that lies before them - in the very interest of their citizens. The Commission will then revert to the issue and ensure that a positive outcome of the dialogue is reflected in the final version of both reports, which will be rapidly adopted.

Let me now turn to the report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which was adopted by the Commission today. As you know, the December 2012 General Affairs Council, in considering the Commission's fourth recommendation to open accession negotiations, asked the Commission to provide an extra Report on the implementation of European Union-related reforms and on steps taken to promote good neighbourly relations and on the 'name issue' which it would take into account in its discussions - and hopefully decision - in June.

In our Report, and during last week's High Level Accession Dialogue, we reviewed the progress which has taken place on the implementation of reforms in the five priority areas set out in the government's roadmap:

- Freedom of expression and the media;
- Rule of law and fundamental rights and inter-ethnic dialogue;
- Public administration reform;
- Electoral reform;
- Strengthening the market economy.

The Commission Report concludes that the implementation of reforms has continued, despite the political crisis. But let me also be clear that the 1 March agreement by which the parties agreed to resolve the crisis, in which your colleagues Richard Howitt and Jerzy Buzek also played an important role, needs to be fully implemented, in particular:

- the Committee of Inquiry;
- the cross-party Memorandum of Understanding;
- and the resumption of dialogue with journalists.

These are all points which I made clearly last week in Skopje when I attended the fourth High Level Accession Dialogue meeting.

The Report also concludes that relations with neighbours have remained good and steps have been taken on bilateral relations with Bulgaria and Greece. On the 'name issue' I note that the UN Secretary General's Special Representative tabled another proposal last week in talks in New York with the two negotiators and hope that this can lead to agreement.

To conclude, an immense amount of progress has been made over the last 6 months. The challenge now is to maintain that momentum so that full use can be made of the opportunities that have been created for the candidates and potential candidates.

We remain committed to the process and will keep our promise – to move the countries closer to the European Union once the necessary reforms are delivered and the criteria have been met. The continued support of this Committee will be crucial in that regard.

Thank you.