

**EUROPEAN UNION-FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC
OF MACEDONIA
JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE
31 March 2009 - Brussels**

**FINAL
DECLARATION**

adopted unanimously on 31 March 2009

Brussels, 31 March 2009

The EU - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee held its 6th meeting in Brussels on 31 March 2009 under the joint Chairmanship of Mr Antonios TRAKATELLIS (EPP-ED, Greece) and Mr Aleksandar SPASENOVSKI (VMRO-DPMNE, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). At this meeting, the Committee held an exchange of views with Mr. Ivica BOCEVSKI, Deputy-Prime Minister of the Government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Mr Libor SEČKA, Director-General of the European Union Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, representing the EU Presidency-in-Office of the Council of the European Union and Mr Jan TRUSZCZYNSKI, Deputy Director in the DG ENLARGEMENT, representing the European Commission on the EU - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia relations.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee addressed the following issues:

- ❖ Exchange of views with the Government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on the relations between the European Union and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
- ❖ Liberalization of the visa regime for the citizens of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
- ❖ Environmental issues;
- ❖ Related educational Community programs;
- ❖ Management of EU funds, with a particular view to the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).

Taking into account:

- A. The Feira 2000 European Council Conclusions and the Thessaloniki 2003 European Council Conclusions;
- B. The European Council decision to grant the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the status of candidate country for EU membership of 17 December 2005;
- C. The EU/Western Balkans Salzburg Declaration of 11 March 2006;
- D. The European Council Conclusions of December 2006;
- E. The conclusion of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements between the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the European Community of 18 September 2007;

- F. The European Council Conclusions of June 2008;
- G. The Final Statement of the 5th EU - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee of 28 November 2008;
- H. The EU Brdo-Presidency Statement of March 2008;
- I. The European Parliament Resolution on the Commission's Progress Report 2008 on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia of 12 March 2009;
- J. The European Commission Progress Report on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the EU Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2008 - 2009 of 5 November 2008;
- K. The Accession Partnership adopted by the Council of EU in February 2008;

The Joint Parliamentary Committee addresses the following recommendations to the institutions of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and of the European Union:

1. Welcomes the fact that the parties in government and the opposition in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, with the widespread support of civil society and public opinion, are united in their desire to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria and SAP conditions for EU membership; in which connection emphasises that it is not primarily a matter of complying with external requirements, but rather of improving the candidate country's own future;
2. Recalls the clear EU membership prospect, which the Thessaloniki European Council of 2003 offered to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the other Western Balkan countries, and the conditionality set out in the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) and the Thessaloniki agenda;
3. Reiterates that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is taking steps to meet the SAP criteria, requirements and conditions for membership of the EU, and thus progress has been made in the implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement signed in 2001, the Ohrid Framework Agreement and the recent progress in the implementation of the Commission's benchmarks; regrets however that, three years after it was granted the status of candidate for membership of the EU, accession negotiations have not yet started; considers it

desirable that this exceptional situation should end and urges the Council to accelerate this process by deciding on a date for the beginning of accession negotiations, during the current 2009 year, providing the country fully implements the key priorities of the Accession Partnership; reiterates the importance for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as an EU candidate country to continue to foster good neighbourly relations;

4. Commends the progress made in the process of visa liberalisation with the high number of biometric travel and identity documents issued, the system of integrated border management and the establishment of a national visa information system; notes with satisfaction the progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings, illegal migration and corruption, and calls on the government to continue the efforts in this field; welcomes the implementation of the readmission agreement with the EU and calls for closer cooperation with FRONTEX, EUROPOL and EUROJUST; calls on the Commission, given the progress achieved on specific benchmarks, to recommend to the Council as soon as possible visa liberalisation for citizens of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and to abolish the visa requirement as soon as possible;
5. Takes note of the continuous commitment by the Assembly leadership for promotion of constructive and inclusive dialogue, especially in areas which require consensus between all political parties, in that sense welcomes the regular meetings on a weekly basis of all coordinators of parliamentary groups represented in the Assembly aimed at resolving all outstanding issues related to the parliamentary work, in order to avoid repetition of past practices; welcomes the launching of the e-parliament project aimed to increase the transparency of parliamentary work and to bring the citizens closer to their MPs, as well as to increase the efficiency of the Parliament and enable full flow of all documents in the legislative procedure;
6. Welcomes the further positive role and successful work of the National Council for Euro-Integration, as a body that encompasses all main stakeholders in the Euro-Integration process and strengthen the political dialog for the major priorities in the country;
7. Commends the significant progress made by the government in fulfilling the economic criteria that brought the country closer to a functional market economy, in particular the facilitation of the tax payment procedures, reform of one-stop-shop registration,

foreign trade facilitation and the cutting of red tape; encourages the government to continue its policies aimed at stable GDP growth, a low inflation rate, fiscal discipline and a strengthening of the overall business climate;

8. Having in mind that the financial crisis may have an indirect effect on trade and foreign investment in the Western Balkans, calls on the Commission to ensure and guarantee smooth continuation of the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and other Western Balkan countries, since this is an important factor for stability in the region and of Europe as a whole;
9. Welcomes the first round of the presidential and municipal elections in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on 22 March 2009, which met most of OSCE and Council of Europe commitments and standards for democratic elections, although some challenges remain; states that the elections were well administered and free of the violent incidents that clouded the parliamentary elections of 2008; calls for preservation of independent and diverse information by radio and television, in which connection of the various opinions existing within the society should remain visible by preserving the editorial freedom of those who purvey information; calls on the political leaders and institutions of the country to fully assume their responsibilities and ensure that the conduct of the second round of elections on 5 April meets international standards;
10. Notes that some progress has been made in the area of horizontal environmental legislation; welcomes adoption of the implementing legislation related to landfills and waste and calls on the government to develop new refuse disposal sites and to close and clear the old disposal sites; calls for the quality and the level of the water in the border lakes Ohrid, Prespa and Dojran to be improved and preserved, as well as for effective agreements on that matter with neighbours Albania and Greece; warns that without new investments in storage, treatment and transport of water, the continuity of the supplies of the drinking water to urban places may be jeopardized;
11. Welcomes the enactment of the Law on higher education that provides framework for the Bologna process, and in particular the extended possibilities for higher education afforded by the opening of new faculties in various towns, including those with curricula in different languages; welcomes also the Law on adult education aimed at providing training for long-term unemployed adults and skills for which there is strong demand;

12. Encourages further use of the European Community Programmes, which enable intensive cooperation and transfer of knowledge among higher education institutions from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the EU Member States; notes that the increased mobility of persons knowledge and skills at higher education level with the EU member states will contribute to the quality of education and will bring the young people closer to their fellow students and to the European values;
13. Welcomes the progress made so far in the political representation of the Roma; at the same time, urges the government to accelerate, and to provide adequate resources for, the implementation of the existing Roma policies and to mitigate the disadvantaged position of the Roma minority in the country, in the light inter alia of the most recent report by Amnesty International;
14. Urges that members of the public who submit complaints about abuses of power and/or corruption be issued with a document clearly certifying that they have done so; welcomes the existing practice of informing citizens of the action taken on their complaint and of the ultimate result, and the fact that these complaints are registered in a clear and uniform manner by the police and judicial authorities;
15. Asks the Government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to relaunch the process of liberalisation and privatisation of local public services, paying particular attention to the electricity production, transport and distribution industries;
16. Supports the continuous efforts by the Government and the progress achieved in the establishment of necessary structures for decentralised management of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) and encourages the Commission to reach a decision and to entrust the management of IPA to the national authorities; acknowledges the fact that pre-accession funds helped the countries in their fulfilment of the necessary criteria and brought them closer to their membership in the EU;
17. Notes the rise in the large number of reports of victims of domestic violence, which is due to the raise of awareness among the population from the wider campaign made by the government and the NGO's; asks that a separate law be passed against such violence in addition to the Family Law which already

exists, to make it possible for the public prosecutor to prosecute perpetrators of domestic violence; welcomes the amendments in the Law;

18. Expresses satisfaction with the quality of the overall political relations between the European Parliament and the Assembly of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; recognizing the importance of the process of further strengthening of the parliamentary cooperation, calls for further promotion of the relations between the two institutions after the elections to the European Parliament in June 2009.