

**EUROPEAN UNION- FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC
OF MACEDONIA
JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE**

7th Meeting – Skopje, 18-19 February 2010

Recommendations
(Adopted on 19 February 2010)

The EU - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee held its 7th meeting in Skopje on 18-19 February 2010 under the joint Chairmanship of Mr Aleksandar SPASENOVSKI (VMRO-DPMNE, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and Mr Jorgo CHATZIMARKAKIS (ALDE, Germany). At this meeting, the Committee held an exchange of views with Mr. Vasko NAUMOVSKI, Deputy-Prime Minister in charge of EU Affairs and Mr. Antonijo MILOSOSKI, Minister of Foreign Affairs, on behalf of the Government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, H.E. Mr Erwan FOUÉRE, European Union Special Representative and Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, on behalf of the European Union and Mrs Alexandra CAS GRANJE, Director in the DG ENLARGEMENT, on behalf of the European Commission.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee addressed the following issues:

- ❖ the relations between the European Union and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
- ❖ the situation of the judiciary and the functioning of public administration;
- ❖ inter-community relations;
- ❖ the economy and the reforms made in view of assuming the obligations of EU membership
- ❖ environmental policies and transport infrastructure, including cross-border cooperation aspects;
- ❖ management of EU funds, with a particular view to the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).

Taking into account:

- A. the European Commission Progress Report on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2009-2010 of 14 October 2009;
- B. the European Parliament Resolution on the Commission's Progress Report 2009 on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia of 10 February 2010;
- C. the Accession Partnership adopted by the Council of the EU in February 2008;
- D. the conclusions of the Council on General Affairs of 7 December 2009,

The Joint Parliamentary Committee, pursuant to Rule 3 of its Rules of Procedure, addresses the following recommendations to the

institutions of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and of the European Union:

On the relations between the EU and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

1. Welcomes the fact that the political parties of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, both in the majority and in the opposition, with the widespread support of the public opinion, are united in their target to take the country forward towards EU membership; emphasises that the accession process is focused on improving the candidate country's standards for democracy, stability, economic prosperity and a better 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 outlined in the Stabilisation and Association Process; welcomes, in this respect, the initiative of the Spanish Presidency to convene a high level conference on the Western Balkans on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Zagreb Summit; welcomes "Agenda 2014", a symbolic but sufficiently close and motivating target for the acceleration of the European integration process for the countries of the region; points out that the accession to the European Union is based on the fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria and the principle of fair conditionality; in that context, points out that member states should not take advantage of the EU institutions for their own interest, which does not go in favour and is contrary to the EU enlargement policy;
3. Reiterates that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has already taken important steps to meet the criteria, requirements and conditions for membership of the EU, and that meaningful progress has been made in the implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement; regrets that, more than four years after the country was granted the status of candidate for membership of the EU, accession negotiations have not started; notes that the European Commission has recommended, in October 2009, to open accession negotiations, having considered that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has a sufficient level of preparedness; encourages the two countries to redouble their efforts at the highest level, especially in the framework of UN negotiations, in order to find a mutually satisfactory solution to the name issue, under the auspices of the UN, and stresses that the European Union should be ready to assist in the negotiations process; urges the Council,

following its Conclusions of 7 December 2009, to “return to the matter” of opening accession negotiations as soon as possible and to decide on a date for the beginning of accession negotiations;

4. Congratulates the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on obtaining visa liberalisation for its citizens, as decided by the Council of the EU, as from 19 December 2009, which is a milestone in the European integration process of the country and a fundamental, tangible benefit for the citizens who will be able to use new social and economic opportunities and to experience first hand people-to-people contacts with their EU homologues;
5. Welcomes the continuous positive role and successful work of the National Council for Euro-Integration, especially as it has succeeded in increasing the participation of civil society in the EU integration process; commends the Government for having maintained the pace of EU related reforms and invites it to step up inter-ministerial coordination;
6. Welcomes the contribution of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to regional stability and its participation in EU civilian and military missions, as well as its alignment with most EU declarations and common positions in foreign and security policy;

Overall, on the political criteria

7. Takes note with satisfaction of the improvement of the political climate and the good progress made in political dialogue, which is visible in the more effective work of the Parliament; welcomes the adoption of a new Law on Parliament but encourages the Parliament to further improve the rules of procedure, including the opposition’s rights;
8. Welcomes the fact that presidential and municipal elections on 22 March and 5 April 2009 marked a net improvement over the parliamentary elections of 2008 and met most of OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections, although some challenges remain; invites the competent authorities to duly address the remarks from the OSCE/ODIHR report well on time before the next electoral exercises, in particular for addressing reports of pressure or intimidation of citizens throughout the electoral period;
9. Notes with satisfaction that the decentralization process, which is a fundamental part of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, continued, but recommends to improve the financial framework

for the local government administrations, as well as their transparency and accountability;

10. Recommends to the state to continue with the protection of the institution family; in that context, notes with concern that domestic violence remains a cause for concern and should be overcome; notes that some prisons are still operated under degrading and inadequate conditions, that rights of children need to be better protected, in particular against sexual abuse, poverty and the risk of being attracted towards delinquency; invites the Parliament and the Government to work on appropriate implementation of the existing laws, to strengthen the prevention mechanisms and to continue to focus on the raising awareness campaigns;
11. Calls on the Parliament and the Government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to continue to improve the legislative frame for the media and call on all the relevant authorities and stakeholders to promote freedom of expression;
12. Calls on the Parliament and the Government to develop, through a public debate, an anti-discrimination strategy in line with the EU acquis; encourages the authorities to take appropriate measures to favour increased participation of women in political life;

In particular, on the fight against corruption, the situation of the judiciary and the functioning of public administration:

13. Notes with satisfaction the progress made in the reform of the civil service, the strengthening of the Civil Servants Agency, the streamlining of recruitment procedures according to the merit and the improved training offered; nevertheless, calls on the State and municipality administrative bodies not to undermine the scope of the Law on Civil Service by hiring temporary staff;
14. Welcomes further progress achieved in the field of the judiciary, for example regarding the appointment procedures and the increase of the courts' budget; nevertheless, points out that some offices and courts remain over-loaded and understaffed and that continuous efforts are necessary to ensure independence and impartiality of the judiciary;
15. Commends the countries' authorities for the good progress they have achieved in anti-corruption policies and the record of prosecution of high-level cases; encourages the authorities,

however, to step up their implementation efforts, considering that corruption continues to be a serious problem in the country;

In particular, on inter-community relations:

16. Recalls the Council's Conclusions of 7 December 2009 which state that the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement remains an essential element of democracy and the rule of law in the country; notes that, furthermore, the Ohrid Framework Agreement is a crucial guarantee of the rights of non-majority communities in the country;
17. Stresses that the effective implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement needs to be maintained in a constructive spirit of consensus and overall inter-community relations should and can be improved in the country; in this context, considers of utmost importance the role of education and calls on the relevant authorities to gradually phase out the practice of community shifts in schools; invites everyone, and in particular the political leaders at national and local level, to avoid any provocative language or attitude;
18. Notes, on the eve of the 9th anniversary of the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, that more attention should be paid to the demands of the smaller ethnic communities as a condition for a full equality of all ethnic communities in the state; in that sense, welcomes the establishment of the Agency for Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Members of the Communities; congratulates the Government for including, on a higher level, members from the smaller ethnic communities in the government structures; though, notes that little progress has been reported regarding the use of the languages of the smaller ethnic communities and encourages the responsible authorities to address their concerns more properly;
19. Notes that progress made so far in the policies for the Roma has been limited; at the same time, urges the government to provide adequate resources for mitigating the disadvantages of the Roma minority in the country, in particular as far as healthcare, housing, access to education, social protection and access to employment are concerned;

On the economy and the reforms made in view of assuming the obligations of EU membership

20. Commends the significant progress made by the government in fulfilling the economic criteria and in taking the country closer to

being a functioning market economy and more and more friendly for business; encourages the government, especially in the current recession context, to continue and strengthen its policies in particular in view of reducing the budget deficit, to reduce the high unemployment and to combat poverty;

On environment and transport infrastructures, including cross-border cooperation

21. Notes that some progress has been made in the area of horizontal environmental legislation; however, encourages the authorities to step up their efforts for due implementation, especially at the local level, which must be a priority, in view of the importance of improving waste and water management for the better standards of life of the country's population, but also in view of the potential of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as a tourist destination; reiterates its call for effective monitoring of water quality and water levels in the Ohrid, Prespa and Dojran border lakes and in the river Vardar; calls for closer cross-border cooperation on environmental issues, on the basis of EU standards, and welcomes in this regard the initiatives taken at regional level, such as the recent meeting between the Prime Ministers of Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania;
22. Calls on the Government to work on strengthening the administrative capacities in the various sectors of the transport branch, and in particular in the sector of public transport, and to establish the independent regulatory bodies and authorities where needed, in particular those competent on safety;
23. Expresses its conviction that a well integrated transport system in the region of the Western Balkans and from/to this region and the EU neighbours is vital for dynamizing regional cooperation, economic activities and people-to-people contacts; in this context, welcomes the regional cooperation initiatives and the projects related to environment protection and transport upgrading; recalls that part of the IPA funds are devoted to cross border cooperation;

On the management of EU funds, with a particular view to IPA

24. Supports the continuous efforts by the Government and welcomes the progress achieved in the establishment of the necessary structures for decentralised management of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA); notes with

satisfaction the Commission's decision to entrust the management of IPA to the national authorities on the components: regional development, human resources and rural development; in view of further accreditations, encourages the relevant authorities to abide by the rules of sound and rigorous financial management.
