2016 Commission report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

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The European Parliament adopted by 503 votes to 113 with 45 abstentions, a resolution on the 2016 Commission Report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Parliament recalled that (potential) candidate countries are judged on their own merits and the speed and quality of the necessary reforms determine the timetable for accession. In this regard, it noted that the country has been considered for many years as **one of the most advanced EU candidate countries** in terms of alignment with the acquis.

2016 anticipated elections and formation of a new government: Parliament welcomed the formation of a new government on 31 May 2017 and urged all political parties to act in a spirit of reconciliation, in the common interest of all citizens and to work with the government on restoring confidence in the country and its institutions. It welcomed the respect for fundamental freedoms shown at the early elections on 11 December 2016, which were well administered, were held in a transparent and inclusive manner and proceeded without major incidents.

Members called on all parties to refrain from any obstruction of the effective functioning of the parliament and urged the new government to **swiftly proceed with the necessary reforms, to ensure the country's Euro-Atlantic integration** and to advance its European perspective for the benefit of citizens.

It considered cross-party and inter-ethnic cooperation essential for addressing pressing domestic and EU-related challenges, and for maintaining the positive recommendation to.

Accession reforms: Parliament reiterated its support for the opening of accession negotiations, conditional on the progress of the implementation of the Pržino Agreement to ensure its full, tangible and sustainable implementation and substantial progress in the implementation of the Urgent Reform Priorities on **systemic reforms**. It called on the Council to address the issue of the accession negotiations at its earliest convenience.

It underlined that implementation of the Pržino agreement is vital also beyond the elections to ensure political stability and sustainability in the future.

Parliament underlined the significant progress the country has made in the process of EU integration and emphasised the negative consequences of further delaying the process of integration, including the threat to the credibility of the EU's enlargement policy and the risk of instability in the region. It drew attention to the potential negative political, security and socio-economic consequences of further delays in the country's **Euro-Atlantic integration process** and in this regard called on the Commission and the EEAS to increase the visibility of EU-funded projects in the country in order to bring the EU closer to the citizens of the country.

The current challenges facing the European Union (Brexit, migration, radicalism, etc.) should not hinder the enlargement process, but rather that these challenges have demonstrated the need to fully integrate the Western Balkans into EU structures in order to enhance and deepen partnership and **overcome international crises**.

Members expressed concern about the politicised public administration. It urged new government to demonstrate a strong political commitment to enhancing professionalism, merit, neutrality and independence.

Further measures are awaited such as:

- a comprehensive e-governance strategy accompanied by the further development of e-services for citizens and businesses in order to reduce the bureaucratic burden for the state, citizens and business;
- strengthening the judiciary, by improving transparency in the appointment and promotion procedures and by reducing the length of court proceedings and putting an end to judicial obstructions faced by the Special Prosecutor's Office.

Anti-corruption measures are also called for.

Fight against criminality, radicalisation and discrimination: although Parliament welcomed the dismantling of criminal networks and routes related to trafficking in human beings and drugs, it called for the rapid implementation of prevention measures against radicalisation. It called for **continued monitoring of returning foreign fighters by security services**, their proper reintegration into society and a constant exchange of information with the authorities of the EU and neighbouring countries.

The importance of a regular and constructive dialogue and cooperation with civil society organisations was stressed.

Parliament reiterated its condemnation of hate speech against discriminated groups, in particular LGBTI people and the Roma people.

Moreover, it called for further efforts to promote gender equality and increase the participation of women in political life and employment. Measures are also called for to review the law on prevention and protection against domestic violence.

Inter-ethnic reconciliation: Parliament urged all political parties and civil society organisations to actively promote an inclusive and tolerant multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society. It condemned any form of irredentism and any attempt to disintegrate different social groups. According to Members, the authorities and civil society should take appropriate measures to achieve historical reconciliation in order to overcome the divide between and within different ethnic and national groups, including citizens of Bulgarian identity. Measures should also be put in place to combat stereotypes and to improve the freedom of the media.

Parliament called on the Commission to make further efforts to **support a true reconciliation process in the region**, notably through support for cultural projects dealing with the recent past and promoting a common and shared understanding of history and a public and political culture of tolerance, inclusion and reconciliation.

Economic reforms and reduction of unemployment: Parliament remained concerned that the political situation represents a serious risk to the Macedonian economy. It called for measures to enhance job creation, especially among young people, women and the disabled.

It is concerned about the sustainability of public debt and the fact that unemployment still remains high.

On an environmental level, Parliament expressed concern about industrial pollution and air and water pollution and called for a comprehensive policy and strategy on climate action in this country.

Migration policy and refugee policy: Parliament commended the country for its constructive role and cooperation and its tremendous efforts in addressing the challenges of the migration crisis, thus substantially contributing to the security and stability of the EU. It noted that the country lies on the so-called "Western Balkans route" and that approximately 600 000 refugees and migrants, including vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly, have so far travelled through it on their way to Europe. It urged the Commission to continue the work on migration-related issues with all the countries of the Western Balkans, in order to make sure that European and international norms and standards are followed.

Regional cooperation and relations with Greece: Parliament considered that regional cooperation is an essential element in the EU accession process and should be a priority for the government. It called on the Macedonian authorities to also align with the EU's restrictive measures against Russia following the illegal annexation of Crimea.

Moreover, it stressed the importance of finalising the negotiations on a treaty on friendship and good neighbourliness with Bulgaria.

Parliament welcomed the tangible results from the initiative for confidence-building **measures between this country and Greece**, which could contribute to a better understanding and stronger bilateral relations, paving the way for a **mutually acceptable solution to the name issue**. It reiterated their invitation to the Vice-President/High Representative (VP/HR) and the Commission to develop new initiatives to overcome the remaining differences and to work, in cooperation with the two countries and the UN Special Representative, on a mutually acceptable solution on the name issue and to report back to Parliament thereon.