

2018 Commission report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

2018/2145(INI) - 18/10/2018 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Ivo VAJGL (ALDE, SI) on the 2018 Commission report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Members welcomed the government's strong political commitment to fully implement the **Pržino Agreement** concluded in 2015 between the four main political parties and the priority reforms to be implemented urgently, which has led to an intensification of efforts on EU-related reforms, based on transparent and inter-ethnic cooperation and consultations with civil society. They encouraged the new government to **maintain the positive momentum** that has been built.

The report also welcomed the signing of the **Prespa Agreement** concluded on 17 June 2018 between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and congratulated both sides on their considerable efforts to reach a mutually satisfactory solution to the name issue.

Members considered that a **swift opening of the screening process and accession negotiations** would deepen the momentum for reform, provide new incentives for the democratisation process and strengthen control and accountability.

Democratisation: the report welcomed improvements in electoral legislation, but stressed the need for a **timely revision of the Electoral Code** by comprehensively addressing the remaining OSCE/ODIHR, Venice Commission and GRECO recommendations on campaign financing and on political parties.

Members called for, *inter alia*:

continued efforts to prevent and investigate any form of intimidation on voters; political parties are urged to democratise their internal decision-making processes;

the national parliament to make full use of its oversight and legislative functions, while strictly limiting the use of urgency procedures which undermine parliamentary and public scrutiny;

the achievement of positive and credible results in the field of intelligence monitoring and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country;

the effective launch of the implementation of the public administration reform strategy, and the definition of clear rules on accountability;

further steps to ensure citizens' right of access to public information, increase the openness of the decision-making process and improve inter-institutional coordination.

Rule of law: Members recalled that the proper functioning of the **judicial system** and effective measures to **combat corruption** are of paramount importance in the EU accession process. The government is invited to:

- intensify efforts to properly implement the judicial reform strategy by putting in place sound monitoring and evaluation mechanisms;

- step up efforts to establish a track record of investigations, prosecutions and final convictions in cases of high-level corruption and organised crime;
- intensify the fight against money laundering and conflicts of interest by establishing and strengthening the capacity of anti-corruption and crime units, as well as financial investigations, and by freezing, confiscating, recovering and managing assets;
- develop a regional strategy and strengthen cooperation among all countries in the region to more effectively address the problem of corruption and organised crime, which are widespread in the region;
- improve the asylum system and migration management as well as mutually beneficial regional cooperation and partnership with Frontex under a new status agreement with a view to dismantling human trafficking networks.

Fundamental rights, civil society, media: while welcoming the reforms and efforts to gradually align the legal framework with EU standards, Members recommended:

- furthering measures to foster educational inclusion of minorities with a view to reinvigorating social cohesion and integration of communities;
- completing legal reforms to combat discrimination and violence against women and children, and continue to eradicate the still widespread domestic and gender-based violence;
- implementing strategies to end the dire situation of people with disabilities and the persistent discrimination against them;
- effectively combatting hate crimes and hate speech against minorities, including vulnerable groups such as the Roma and the LGBTI community;
- improving the operational environment for civil society organisations by strengthening the legal, financial, administrative and political framework, including laws on foundations and donations;
- establishing additional safeguards against the politicisation of the media, to strengthen the independence and capacity of the media regulator and public broadcasting and to take measures to prevent impunity in cases of violence, abuse or threats against journalists.

Economy: the report stressed the need to improve the **business environment** by ensuring fiscal consolidation and regulatory transparency and reliability. It urged the authorities to:

- address the large informal economy and the persistent problems of tax evasion and weak contract enforcement which continue to deter foreign direct investment;
- develop, without further delay, a long-term digital agenda;
- tackle long-term unemployment, youth unemployment and the low rate of participation of women on the employment market in a comprehensive and innovative manner.

Air pollution is a major problem in Macedonia cities. According to the latest study conducted by the Finnish Meteorological Institute and the Institute of Public Health, Skopje and Tetovo have the highest concentration of fine particles in the air (PM2.5) out of all European cities. Members called for adequate measures to be taken without further delay to deal with this emergency situation.