

2018 Commission report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

2018/2145(INI) - 29/11/2018 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 470 votes to 116 with 46 abstentions a resolution on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

It noted that the prospect of EU membership is the great spur to reforms in the country, especially as regards the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary and the fight against corruption. It remarked that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is considered to be the candidate country which has made the most progress in aligning its legislation with the EU acquis.

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.

Parliament also welcomed the signing of the Prespa Agreement concluded on 17 June 2018 between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and commended the positive diplomacy and active trust-building efforts leading to compromise, the settlement of open bilateral issues and the promotion of good neighbourly relations. Members stressed that bilateral issues should not obstruct the accession process. It took note of the result of the 30 September 2018 referendum regarding the country's name. Members encouraged the government in Skopje to undertake all necessary steps in order to honour the provisions of the Prespa Agreement, which opens the door to EU and NATO accession negotiations.

Parliament stated 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 resolution 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;
- 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: Parliament 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;
- make further efforts to shield the judiciary from political interference;
- step up efforts to establish a track record of prosecutions and final convictions in cases of high-level corruption and organised crime;
- intensify the fight against **money laundering** and conflicts of interest by strengthening the capacity of anti-corruption and crime units, as well as financial investigations, and by confiscating assets;
- develop a regional strategy among all countries in the region to more effectively address the problem of corruption and organised crime;
- improve the asylum system and migration management with a view to dismantling human trafficking networks.
- intensify efforts to combat Islamic radicalisation and foreign terrorist fighters and continue monitoring of returning foreign fighters by the security services, their proper reintegration into society and the constant exchange of information with the authorities of the EU and of neighbouring countries.

Fundamental rights, civil society: 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.

Media: Parliament noted modest improvements in the media environment and conditions for independent reporting and welcomed the termination of state-sponsored advertising in the media based on political favouritism. It called for further safeguards against politicisation of the media.

Economy: Parliament 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;
- address the high youth unemployment rate by bridging the mismatch between the skills of young graduates and the needs of private companies;
- develop a long-term digital agenda;
- tackle long-term unemployment and the low rate of participation of women on the employment market.

Lastly, Parliament called for urgent measures to deal with air pollution, noting that Skopje and Tetovo have the highest concentration of fine particles in the air (PM2.5) out of all European cities.