

# Report on FYROM's 2006 progress report

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted, by a comfortable majority, the initiative report drafted by Erik **MEIJER** (GUE/NGL, NL) on the 2006 Progress Report on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYRoM). In so doing, it welcomes the progress made by this country since its application to become a Member of the European Union. However, it points out that the reform momentum must be maintained and that the adopted legislation must now be properly and promptly implemented, especially in the fields of the **police**, the **judiciary**, **public administration** and the **fight against corruption**, in order to establish a true market economy, to stimulate economic growth and employment and to improve the business climate.

As regards the opening of the accession negotiations, the FYRoM is encouraged to profit from the experience of Slovenia and Croatia in the process of joining the EU, both of those countries having inherited the same federal laws and sharing practical experience of the former Yugoslavia. The new Member States are called upon to play an active role in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's move towards the European Union, allowing it to benefit from their experience of reforms.

**1) Political criteria:** the Macedonian Government is commended for its cooperation in the field of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and its willingness to contribute to the development of the ESDP capabilities and future EU-led civilian and military crisis management missions. The committee notes with satisfaction that following the internal conflict of 2001, in close cooperation with the EU, solutions have been found through the Ohrid Framework agreement to enable all citizens, regardless of their ethnic background, to live together in equality and peace, by strengthening the use of minority languages in public administration and education, through municipal reorganisation and by means of the application of the double majority principle (the **Badinter principle**) that protects the position of ethnic minorities in parliamentary decision-making. It notes that that in 2007 agreement has been reached on the national holidays of the different ethnic and religious groups. It emphasises that the Ohrid Framework Agreement has transformed the country by taking full account of its multi-ethnic and multicultural character, thus representing a core part of the political criteria for EU membership. It points out that the Badinter mechanism, as enshrined in the Constitution, is intended as a means to dialogue and consensus in a multi-ethnic state and regrets that early in 2007, as a result of dissatisfaction with the application of the Badinter principle, the largest Albanian opposition party ceased all parliamentary activity.

As regards the **controversial issue of the name of the country**, the MEPs regret that since the admission of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to the UN in 1993, when in order to obtain international recognition the provisional name 'the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' was employed, and since the Interim Accord of 1995 no agreement has been reached with the neighbouring country of Greece. It urges the FYRoM and Greece to bring talks under the aegis of the UN on this issue to a successful conclusion as soon as possible. It is highlighted that the name issue neither is nor can be part of the conditions related to the country's EU accession agenda and that, as in the case of all other candidate countries, its integration into the EU will depend exclusively on fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria.

Another recommendation calls for the country to learn from European best practices in public administration and education that take account of ethnic and linguistic differences. Further agreement is sought on the way in which the two largest ethnic communities and the different minorities can live with one another on an equal and harmonious basis.

**Situation of the Roma:** specific and urgent measures need to be taken to improve the situation of the Roma by using the National Strategy on Roma, involving well developed Roma civil society as the main partner. Matching government funds with IPA funds should be a way towards improving the social inclusion of the Roma in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

MEPs welcome the country's constructive position on the future status of **Kosovo**, however, it regrets that in anticipation of the future status of Kosovo it has not been possible for any further frontier demarcation to take place. They trust that agreement will be reached on this technical issue with all speed and welcomes the fact that the farmers concerned are able to go on using parts of their land that happen to lie on the other side of the frontier.

The authorities of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are urged to promote regional cooperation and the development of good neighbourly relations.

The committee calls urgently for improvement and maintenance of the water quality and water level in the frontier lakes of Ohridsko Ezero, Prespansko Ezero and Dojransko Ezero, and for effective agreements on this aspect with the neighbouring countries of Albania and Greece. Attention is drawn to the need to improve the overall attitude towards the environment, inter alia by eliminating illegal rubbish dumps along roads, river banks and on the edge of woodlands by introducing a waste collection system that is separate as far as possible.

**2) Economic criteria:** MEPs express serious concern over the fact that unemployment remains extremely high and calls on the Government to devise efficient policies to combat poverty and social inequalities. They stress the need for different trade union federations to be able to coexist on an equal basis. The committee considers it undesirable that civil servants should lose their jobs or be encouraged to leave with changes of government, and in particular expects civil servants who are specially trained to meet the needs of the EU *acquis* to continue their work.

**3) Application of the *acquis*:** as regards **visa facilitation and readmission agreements:** the committee welcomes the initialling of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements with the EU as a transitional step towards a mutual visa-free travel regime, and to this end calls on the Commission to set out a roadmap to increase mobility, including greater participation in life-long learning and cultural exchange projects, and on the Macedonian Government to continue its commitment to fulfil the required European standards in the fields of justice, freedom and security. The introduction of the new passports with biometric security features is welcomed. The Member States are called upon to fully recognise Macedonian passports. The committee calls urgently for the full recognition of the Macedonian passport by all EU Member States and for the abolition of national supplementary visa payments, particularly the provisions that make it more difficult to visit Greece than other EU Member States.

On an **international level**, MEPs point out again that the authorities are expected to investigate the circumstances in which a German citizen, Khaled El-Masri, was abducted to Afghanistan in 2003 and to make public the results of the investigation. The committee regrets the signing by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia of the Bilateral Immunity Agreement with the USA, which excludes American citizens and military personnel from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. It points out that the International Criminal Court is a cornerstone of international law and that the Rome Statute has been firmly supported by the EU and calls in this regard on the Macedonian Government to find ways to terminate that bilateral agreement, which undermines the full effectiveness of the International Criminal Court.