

2006 Progress Report on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

European Parliament resolution of 12 July 2007 on the 2006 Progress Report on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2006/2289(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Presidency Conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council of 19-20 June 2003, at which the promise was made to all Western Balkan states that they would in the long term join the European Union,
- having regard to the European Council decision of 16 December 2005 to grant the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the status of candidate country for EU membership and the Presidency Conclusions of the European Councils of 15-16 June 2006 and of 14-15 December 2006,
- having regard to the conclusions of the Second Meeting of the EU-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Stabilisation and Association Council of 18 July 2005 and the conclusions of the Third Meeting of the EU-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Stabilisation and Association Council of 11 December 2006,
- having regard to Council Decision 2006/57/EC of 30 January 2006 on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the European Partnership with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and repealing Decision 2004/518/EC¹,
- having regard to the Commission's 2006 Progress Report on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (SEC(2006)1387),
- having regard to its resolution of 13 December 2006 on the Commission's Communication on the Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2006–2007²,
- having regard to the recommendations of the EU-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee of 29-30 January 2007,
- having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A6-0214/2007),
- A. whereas further enlargement of the European Union is not an end in itself, whereas strict compliance with the Copenhagen criteria is required of Member States and whereas every candidate country will be judged on its own merits,
- B. whereas the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been successfully involved in negotiations relating *inter alia* to relations with the European Union, such as the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), the Central European Free Trade Association (CEFTA), the efforts of the European Union regarding peaceful resolution of

¹ OJ L 35, 7.2.2006, p. 57.

² Texts adopted of that date, P6_TA(2006)0568.

internal differences of opinion in 2001 and the preparations for adopting the EU *acquis* in the period leading up to 2011,

- C. whereas, since the recognition of the status of candidate country by the EU on 16 December 2005, accession negotiations have not yet started with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,
 - D. whereas, whilst the principles underlying the Ohrid Framework Agreement of 13 August 2001 have now been embedded in the constitutional and legal framework of the country, a sustained effort is needed to fully implement its provisions, in particular as regards the continuation of the decentralisation process and the equitable representation of non-majority communities at national and local level,
 - E. whereas the Presidency Conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council of 19-20 June 2003 reiterated its determination to fully and effectively support the European perspective of the Western Balkans countries, which will become an integral part of the EU, once they meet the established criteria,
 - F. whereas ultimate success in fostering economic reforms will not be guaranteed unless political consensus and inter-ethnic trust can first be achieved,
 - G. whereas the Presidency Conclusions of the Brussels European Council of 14-15 December 2006 stated that the EU keeps its commitments towards countries that are in the enlargement process and reiterated that each country's progress towards the European Union depends on its individual efforts to comply with the Copenhagen criteria and the conditionality of the Stabilisation and Association Process,
 - H. whereas the EU/Western Balkans Salzburg Declaration of 11 March 2006, unanimously adopted by all Foreign Ministers of the European Union and the Foreign Ministers of the Western Balkan countries, reaffirms the importance of good neighbourly relations and the need to find mutually acceptable solutions regarding outstanding issues with neighbouring countries,
1. Welcomes the progress made by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, since its application to become a Member of the European Union, in meeting the Copenhagen political criteria and in implementing the recommendations of the 2004 European Partnership, the provisions of the SAA and the requirements of the Stabilisation and Association Process; 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;
 2. Emphasises that the commencement of accession negotiations will depend on the progress being made in this respect; encourages all stakeholders to keep up the momentum and stresses the need for both the government and opposition political forces to continue the implementation of reforms necessary for the country's integration into the EU;
 3. Commends the Government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for its cooperation in the field of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), notably its participation in the EU

mission ALTHEA and its willingness to contribute to the development of the ESDP capabilities and future EU-led civilian and military crisis management missions;

4. 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 non-majority communities in parliamentary decision-making; notes that in 2007 agreement has been reached on the national holidays of the different ethnic and religious groups;
5. 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 Copenhagen political criteria for EU membership; points out that respecting the letter and spirit of the Agreement will remain crucial for the country's European journey towards accession to the EU; stresses once more that the Badinter principle must be fully respected and that all parties need to respect and work within the democratic institutions which the country has made such efforts to set up;
6. Points out that the Badinter principle, as enshrined in the Constitution of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, is intended as a means to dialogue and consensus in a multi-ethnic state; 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; welcomes the fact that the consultations between government and the opposition resulted in an agreement covering the list of laws to be adopted by applying the Badinter principle, the use of the Albanian language in public institutions, the social security situation of former Albanian guerrilla fighters and the composition of the Committee on Inter-Ethnic Relations, thus enabling all elected members to resume their parliamentary duties and to show political responsibility; calls on this basis, following the implementation of the agreement, for the status of EU candidate country that was granted in 2005 to be accompanied as soon as possible by the actual start of accession negotiations; finally, invites all parties to maintain and consolidate this spirit of dialogue in settling their divergences and to pursue jointly the reform agenda which is essential for the country's European prospects;
7. Regrets the practice of boycotting parliamentary activity and points out that such practices are incompatible with functioning parliamentary institutions, which all candidate countries or those aspiring to join the EU are expected to have;
8. Recalls that consistent application of the Badinter principle ensures continued inter-ethnic cooperation and a relationship of trust between all parties; regrets in this respect the recent example of the vote on the amendments to the Broadcasting Law, whereby, although the law itself was adopted in accordance with the Badinter principle, the amendments were only adopted by a simple majority; calls urgently for maintenance and consistent application of the independence of public broadcasting established in the Law of November 2005, which – unlike the previous situation of political interference – complies with European media standards;
9. Recommends that the country should learn from European best practices in public administration and education that take account of ethnic and linguistic differences; calls

for further agreement 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; calls in this respect for the effective implementation of the constitutional provisions designed to guarantee equitable representation of non-majority communities in the public administration;

10. Draws attention to the fact that 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; considers that matching government funds with funds from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance¹ and institutionally recognising the Roma Advisory Group should be a way towards improving the social inclusion of the Roma in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
11. Points out that there are a number of countries in Europe whose name coincides with that of part of the territory of a neighbouring state, and that each state chooses its name in freedom; welcomes the fact that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has changed its national flag and has made constitutional amendments to confirm the absence of territorial claims against neighbouring countries; regrets the recent name change of the national airport to 'Alexander the Great';
12. Regrets 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 13 September 1995 no agreement has been reached with the neighbouring country of Greece; urges the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece to bring talks under the aegis of the UN on this issue to a successful conclusion as soon as possible; calls on the Council to facilitate such negotiations;
13. Points out, in this respect, that a number of countries, including the United States, the Russian Federation and China, as well as certain EU Member States, have already recognised the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia by its constitutional name; recalls that some of those countries have repeatedly stated that they will accept the possible outcome of negotiations regarding the name issue under the aegis of the UN; takes the view that, pursuant to the provisions of the Interim Accord of 1995, the name issue is not an obstacle to the opening of negotiations for EU accession and that, as is the case for all other candidate countries, its integration into the EU will depend exclusively on fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria, the conditions of the stabilisation and association framework, and the EU's capacity to integrate new Member States;
14. Notes that the United Nations' Special Envoy, Matthew Nimitz, has openly declared that he will shortly resume efforts to achieve a mutually acceptable resolution of the issue as soon as possible and has called for clear support for his efforts;
15. Notes that the Interim Accord of 1995 led to a significant improvement in bilateral relations between the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece and that it contains obligations and rights for both parties, including provisions on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's membership of international, multilateral and regional organisations and institutions;

¹ Council Regulation (EC) No 1085/2006 of 17 July 2006 establishing an Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) (OJ 210, 31.7.2006, p. 82).

16. Notes, furthermore, that, since the conclusion of the Interim Accord of 1995, the scope of economic relations between the two countries has significantly increased, inasmuch as Greece constitutes the largest foreign investor in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, while their trade relations have also been considerably boosted;
17. Welcomes the constructive position of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on the future status of Kosovo; regrets that in anticipation of the future status of Kosovo it has not been possible for any further frontier demarcation to take place; trusts 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;
18. Draws attention to the desirability of adopting measures to facilitate easy frontier traffic with Kosovo, thus enhancing cooperation in the areas of education, culture and employment, as well as maintaining family ties;
19. Urges the authorities of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to promote regional cooperation and the development of good neighbourly relations;
20. Welcomes in this respect the role of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the field of regional cooperation, its commitment to the development of bilateral relations and its active role in regional cooperation processes such as the establishment of the Regional Co-operation Council, CEFTA, the Energy Community Treaty and the European Common Aviation Area;
21. Points to the need to protect water quality in the River Vardar, which drains most of the country and continues on Greek territory as the River Axiós, from the pollution caused by industry and urban residential areas;
22. 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;
23. Draws attention 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;
24. Calls on the authorities of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to continue approximating EU environmental legislation and standards and to implement and enforce adopted legislation;
25. Recalls that all EU Member States guarantee freedom of religion as well as freedom of religious organisation;
26. Emphasises that special attention must be paid to the trafficking of human beings and that strengthening regional cooperation, *inter alia* through the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative, is becoming a necessity in the fight against international organised crime networks;
27. Expresses serious concern over the fact that unemployment remains extremely high and

calls on the Government, in view of the enormous challenges in this field, to devise efficient policies to combat poverty and social inequalities; underlines the need for different trade union federations to be able to coexist on an equal basis, and points out that the present requirement on trade unions to organise 33% of the relevant workforce before they can become contractual partners means that their current membership figures are constantly being called into question by interested parties;

28. Recommends that the distribution of state resources as well as EU funds should take into consideration existing regional and ethnic disparities; considers that the existing regional and ethnic differences should be reduced through the application of the principles of solidarity and cohesion so as to bring about the accelerated development of underdeveloped regions;
29. Takes it for granted that the authorisation of foreign banks should be founded on equal criteria for all, such as compliance with legal requirements in the area of foreign currency dealings, taxation and consumer protection, and rejects the favouring of certain companies or of the countries in which they have their registered office;
30. Recalls that a major incentive and guarantee for the stability and prosperity of the entire region of South-East Europe is the building-up of a modern cross-border infrastructure, and therefore draws attention to the importance of maintaining and improving the railway network, domestic rail traffic and the transit function between Greece and many other EU Member States; welcomes the restoration of the rail link with Kosovo, regrets the lack of progress on the planned direct rail link with Bulgaria and looks forward to further progress relating to European transport corridors VIII and X;
31. 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;
32. Points 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; urges the national parliament of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to set up a committee of inquiry as soon as possible to deal with this case and to cooperate fully with the ongoing inquiry of the German Parliament in order to ascertain the truth;
33. 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 Government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to continue its commitment to fulfil the required European standards in the fields of justice, freedom and security; welcomes the introduction of the new passports with biometric security features by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; takes note of the difficulties faced by the citizens of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia due to the non-recognition by one Member State of the EU of its passports; recalls that this issue has been raised and examined in detail during negotiations on the visa facilitation agreement; points out that a Joint Declaration has been adopted and annexed to the initialled text; calls on all parties concerned to act promptly on that Declaration, as soon as the conditions for its implementation are met;

34. Draws attention to the advantage of the experience of previous negotiations with Slovenia and Croatia, which have inherited the same community laws and practical experience from the former Yugoslavia; underlines the clear prospect of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia becoming a member of the EU and calls for negotiations to start as soon as possible;
35. Calls on the new Member States 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;
36. 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 (ICC); 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; calls in this regard on the Government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to find ways to terminate that bilateral agreement, which undermines the full effectiveness of the ICC;
37. Reiterates the goal of clear European membership for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as well as for all Western Balkan countries, in line with the Thessaloniki Agenda; believes that the prospect of EU accession has to be respected in order to consolidate stability and peace in the region;
38. Considers that the education and training system, investment in human capital and the population's access to the internet must be improved in order to respond to the needs of society;
39. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the government and parliament of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the other candidate countries, and the UN Secretary-General.