

P6_TA-PROV(2009)0135

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: progress report 2008

European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2009 on the 2008 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

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 join the European Union,
- having regard to UN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/817 of 7 April 1993 and S/RES/845 of 18 June 1993,
- 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 to the Presidency Conclusions of the European Councils of 15-16 June 2006 and 14-15 December 2006,
- having regard to the 1995 interim agreement between the Hellenic Republic and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,
- having regard to the EU/Western Balkans Declaration, which was unanimously approved by the Foreign Ministers of all the EU Member States and by the Foreign Ministers of the Western Balkan states in Salzburg on 11 March 2006,
- having regard to the conclusions of the Fourth Meeting of the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Stabilisation and Association Council of 24 July 2007,
- having regard to the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia visa facilitation and readmission agreements of 18 September 2007,
- having regard to Council Decision 2008/212/EC of 18 February 2008 on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the Accession Partnership with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹,
- having regard to the Brdo Statement: New focus on the Western Balkans, made by the EU Presidency on 29 March 2008, underlining the need for a fresh impetus to the Thessaloniki agenda and the Salzburg declaration,
- having regard to the Commission's 2008 Progress Report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (SEC(2008)2695),
- having regard to its resolution of 10 July 2008 on the Commission's 2007 enlargement strategy paper²,

¹ OJ L 80, 19.3.2008, p. 32.

² Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0363.

- having regard to its resolution of 23 April 2008 on the 2007 Progress Report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹,
 - having regard to the recommendations of the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee of 29-30 January 2007 and 26-27 November 2007,
 - having regard to its resolution of 24 October 2007 on the proposal for a Council decision concerning the conclusion of the Agreement between the European Community and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on the facilitation of issuance of short-stay visas²,
 - having regard to its resolution of 24 October 2007 on the proposal for a Council decision concerning the conclusion of the Agreement between the European Community and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on readmission³,
 - having regard to Council Decision 2007/824/EC of 8 November 2007 on the conclusion of the Agreement between the European Community and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on the facilitation of the issuance of visas – Exchange of letters⁴,
 - having regard to Council Decision 2007/817/EC of 8 November 2007 on the conclusion of the Agreement between the European Community and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation – Exchange of letters⁵,
 - having regard to the final declaration of the Fifth EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee, adopted on 28 November 2008,
 - having regard to the Commission Communication of 5 November 2008 entitled Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2008-2009 (COM(2008)0674) and to the conclusions of the General Affairs and External Relations Council held on 9 December 2008,
 - having regard to Rule 103(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the Commission's 2007 enlargement strategy paper attaches great importance – from the initial stages of that strategy onwards – to the rule of law and good governance, particularly in relation to the fight against corruption and organised crime, administrative and judicial reform and civil society development,
- B. whereas the EU has taken steps to improve the quality of the enlargement process,
- C. whereas an EU Member State, namely Greece, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are in the midst of a negotiation process taking place under the aegis of the United Nations aimed at reaching a mutually acceptable solution to the issue of the name of the candidate state; whereas ensuring good neighbourly relations and finding negotiated and mutually acceptable solutions to unresolved issues with neighbours, in line with the Salzburg declaration of 11 March 2006, remain essential,

¹ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0172.

² OJ C 263 E, 16.10.2008, p. 402.

³ OJ C 263 E, 16.10.2008, p. 402.

⁴ OJ L 334, 19.12.2007, p. 120.

⁵ OJ L 334, 19.12.2007, p. 1.

1. Welcomes the fact that the parties in government and the opposition in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, with the widespread support of civil society and public opinion, are united in their desire to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership and for the earliest possible accession to the EU; in which connection emphasises that it is not primarily a matter of complying with externally imposed requirements but rather of improving the candidate country's own future;
2. Reaffirms its full support for the European perspective of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and of all the Western Balkan countries, which is essential for the stability, reconciliation and peaceful future of the region;
3. Welcomes the fact that, seven years after the Ohrid Agreement, the country's Parliament adopted the law on the use of languages in administration and education; welcomes in particular the extended possibilities for higher education afforded by the opening of new faculties in various towns, including those with curricula in different languages; notes the improvement of the equitable representation of members of non-majority communities, notably in the public administration, the police and the military forces;
4. Commends the progress made by the country in the dialogue on visa liberalisation, notably the high number of biometric travel and identity documents issued, the implementation of the integrated border management scheme and the establishment of a national visa information system; notes with satisfaction the progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings, illegal migration and corruption, and calls on the government to continue the efforts in this field; welcomes the implementation of the readmission agreement with the EU and calls for closer cooperation with the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex), the European Police Office (Europol) and the European Union's Judicial Cooperation Unit (Eurojust); takes note of the difficulties faced by the citizens of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia due to the non-recognition of its passports by one EU Member State; and calls on the Commission, given the progress achieved, to recommend to the Council as soon as possible visa liberalisation for citizens of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the abolition of visa requirements;
5. Commends the efforts made by the government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the economic field, which have resulted in significant progress in fulfilling the economic criteria, thus bringing the country closer to a functional market economy; welcomes in particular the facilitation of the tax payment procedures, reform of one-stop-shop registration, foreign trade facilitation and the cutting of red tape; encourages the government to continue its policies aimed at stable GDP growth, a low inflation rate, fiscal discipline and a strengthening of the overall business climate;
6. Observes that, after a series of attempts to disrupt the parliamentary elections on 1 June 2008, particularly in the north-west of the country, the government took effective measures, by means of a partial repeat of elections and effective monitoring of procedures, to arrive at correct election results; welcomes the opening of court proceedings aimed at penalising the perpetrators of the election improprieties; commends the adoption of amendments to the Electoral Code broadly in accordance with the recommendations of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and trusts that everything possible will be done to prevent any attempts to disrupt future elections, such as the presidential and local elections in March 2009;

7. Welcomes the progress achieved in the establishment of necessary structures for decentralised management of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA); supports the efforts made by the government to build up administrative capacities that will permit implementation of the Commission's decision to entrust the management of IPA to the national authorities;
8. Observes that, like most EU Member States, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, following a widely supported decision by its Parliament, recognised, at the same time as Montenegro, the independence of the country's neighbour Kosovo, despite the difficulties which this might cause in the short term to the desired preservation of good relations with another neighbouring country, Serbia; welcomes the agreement reached with the Kosovo authorities concerning the demarcation of the border;
9. Notes that the increased interest in Serbia, which in 2009 could result in the status of candidate for membership of the EU being conferred on it, must not result in any slackening of interest in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia within the EU or in a further slowing of the progress of the accession process;
10. Observes that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is taking steps to meet the criteria for membership of the EU, and takes account of the progress made in the implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement signed in 2001, and of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and the recent progress in the implementation of the Commission's benchmarks; regrets however that, three years after it was granted the status of candidate for membership of the EU, accession negotiations have not yet started, which is an unsustainable situation having demotivating effects for the country, and risks destabilising the region; considers it desirable that this exceptional situation should end; urges that the process be accelerated, and recalls that Parliament in its above-mentioned resolution of 23 April 2008 expressed the hope that a decision would be taken in 2008 concerning the commencement of accession negotiations, recognising that any remaining obstacles to an early accession will have to be eliminated during the years in which the forthcoming negotiations take place; urges the Council to accelerate this process by deciding on a date for the beginning of accession negotiations, during the current year, pending full implementation of the key priorities of the Accession Partnership;
11. Reiterates, in accordance with the conclusions of the European Council held on 19 and 20 June 2008 and those of the General Affairs and External Relations Council held on 8 and 9 December 2008, the importance for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as an EU candidate country, to continue to foster good neighbourly relations and to seek to resolve outstanding issues with its neighbours, including a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution on the name issue, on the basis of its international undertakings and its bilateral and multilateral commitments and obligations;
12. Supports the efforts of mediator Matthew Nimetz within the UN, as envisaged by the above-mentioned UN Security Council resolutions S/RES/817 and S/RES/845 of 1993, aimed at resolving the differences that have arisen over the constitutional name of the state in order to reach final agreement between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece as soon as possible, on the basis of his proposal of 6 October 2008 as to how the distinction between the various areas which belong to different states but have in common the fact that they are called Macedonia can be clarified internationally; realises that this proposal is viewed with hesitation by both parties; takes note of the appointment of the new negotiator for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; requests both parties to remain

committed to the talks under the auspices of the UN and to reach a compromise solution, so that the issue does not continue to represent an obstacle to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's membership of international organisations, as provided for in the above-mentioned Interim Accord of 1995, which is still in force; warns that unless agreement is reached quickly between the two states, this could result in a long delay in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia joining the EU; takes the view that such outstanding bilateral issues in the Balkans should not obstruct accession or take precedence over the process of European integration;

13. Takes note of the application filed by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with the International Court of Justice concerning Article 11 of the Interim Accord; expresses the hope that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece remain committed to continuing the negotiations despite the legal proceedings instituted before the International Court of Justice concerning the application of the Interim Accord; in view of the new round of negotiations announced under the 'Nimetz process', expresses the hope that all governments in the neighbourhood will support the integration of this country in the EU, thus contributing to the stability and prosperity of the region;
14. Welcomes the efforts of the authorities of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to work together with neighbouring EU Member States with a view to reviewing possible discrepancies and misinterpretations of history that may cause disagreements, and urges promotion of the joint celebration of the common cultural and historic heritage shared between the country and its neighbours; is concerned about the lack of progress in countering the resurgence of 'hate speech', particularly in the media and the education system, against neighbouring states, and continues to urge the government to ensure public compliance with relevant EU and Council of Europe standards;
15. Observes that, in a democracy, interaction occurs between the government and the opposition in which there is always room for conflicting opinions, attention is paid to alternative solutions and there is scope for establishing majorities in favour of a change of policy, and that it is important to ensure that sections of the population do not become afraid that this tolerance will decline if one party has a parliamentary majority, which has been the case in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia since the last parliamentary elections;
16. Urges that members of the public who submit complaints about abuses of power and/or corruption be issued with a document clearly certifying that they have done so; welcomes the existing practice of informing citizens of the action taken on their complaint and of the ultimate result, and the fact that these complaints are registered in a clear and uniform manner by the police and judicial authorities;
17. Calls on the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to step up the fight against the links between organised crime in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Albania;
18. Deplores the fact that the new law of 20 September 2007 on the legal status of a church, a religious community and a religious group, has not yet resulted in adherents of different faiths feeling that they have the same opportunities to confess and propagate their faith and to own, use and establish buildings for these purposes as do the two denominations which have traditionally been the largest in the country, namely the 'Macedonian' Orthodox Church and Islam; recalls that the authorities have a duty to protect tolerance towards those whose convictions are different and the right to religious diversity;

19. Regrets the increasing pressure placed on the media by the government forces, in particular during the election campaign; calls for preservation of independent and diverse information by radio and television, in which connection the various opinions which exist within society should remain visible, both by preserving the editorial freedom of those who purvey information and by avoiding the establishment of close links between commercial broadcasters and particular parties or politicians; is also concerned about the great financial dependency of newspapers and TV channels on government advertising and the income that it generates, which may detract from a critical journalistic approach;
20. Observes that, even since the adoption of amendments to the Employment Law of 2005, it is still not clear how the various co-existing trade unions can conclude legally valid contracts with the government and entrepreneurs, in particular given the current obligation for trade unions to represent 33% of the employees concerned before they can become contracting partners, which is an obstacle to diversity and leads interested parties constantly to call into question the membership levels of these trade unions;
21. Calls on the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia rapidly to develop new refuse disposal sites, to close and clear old refuse disposal sites, in the meantime developing practical measures to update the integrated waste cycle, including differentiated waste collection, inter alia by syndicates, and to establish waste-to-energy plants and waste-to-fuel plants;
22. Calls for the quality and level of the water in the border lakes Ohrid, Prespa and Dojran to be improved and preserved and for effective agreements on the matter with neighbours Albania and Greece; also welcomes the proposed draft law on water management and urges that it be considered by its Parliament without delay;
23. Has noted with alarm the negative effects on human beings and the environment of the OKTA oil refinery that is in operation in the town of Ilinden near Skopje and is regarded as the country's biggest polluter;
24. Warns that, without new investment in storage, treatment and transport of water, the continuity of the urban drinking water supply may be jeopardised;
25. Asks the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to relaunch the process of liberalisation and privatisation of local public services, paying particular attention to the electricity production, transport and distribution industries;
26. Regrets that the functioning of the railway network has deteriorated over recent years; notes, in particular, that both the frequency of domestic rail passenger services and connections to neighbouring countries have been reduced to a minimum and that the rolling stock in use is less suitable for passenger services over relatively short distances, so that new investment will be necessary if rail passenger services are to survive in future; regrets the lack of progress with regard to the construction of the railway connection between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria, which would contribute to the economic development and stability of the region as a whole;
27. Encourages the Government to accelerate planning and production from renewable sources with regard, in particular, to solar and wind energy; in this regard, calls on the Skopje authorities to make every effort to develop an energy policy in line with the targets of the

EU and to support the EU's position at the forthcoming conference in Copenhagen on a post-Kyoto treaty;

28. Is concerned about the rise in the large number of reports of victims of domestic violence and urges that a separate law be passed against such violence in addition to the Family Law which already exists, to make it possible for the public prosecutor to prosecute perpetrators of domestic violence;
29. Is alarmed at the disadvantaged position of the Roma minority in the country, in the light inter alia of the most recent report by Amnesty International, according to which 39% of Roma women receive little or no schooling, 83% have never been in official paid employment and 31% suffer from chronic illnesses – percentages which are structurally higher than the average for non-Roma women;
30. Welcomes the progress made so far in the political representation of the Roma; at the same time, urges the government to accelerate, and to provide adequate resources for, the implementation of the existing Roma policies;
31. Joins the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in welcoming the fact that so far none of the minorities who have fled from Kosovo whose members have not acquired permanent resident status have been compelled to leave, and hopes that agreement will soon be reached between the government and the UNHCR on responsibility for financially supporting this group;
32. Given that the international financial crisis has reached Europe and may have an indirect effect on trade and foreign investment in the Western Balkans, calls on the Commission to be vigilant and, if necessary, to adopt adequate measures in order to guarantee the smooth continuation of the Stabilisation and Association Process concerning the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as well as the other Western Balkan countries, which is an important factor for stability in the region and in the best interests of the EU itself;
33. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the Government and Parliament of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.