



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Brussels, 27 July 2010
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**SEVENTH MEETING OF
THE STABILISATION AND ASSOCIATION COUNCIL
BETWEEN THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF
MACEDONIA AND THE EU
Brussels, 27 July 2010
JOINT PRESS RELEASE**

The Stabilisation and Association Council between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the EU (SA Council) held its seventh meeting on 27 July 2010. The meeting was chaired by Steven Vanackere, Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, on behalf of the High Representative, in collaboration with Commissioner Stefan Füle. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia delegation was headed by Antonio Milososki, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Deputy Prime Minister Vasko Naumovski as well as State Secretary Ilham Ismani also attended the meeting. Also, EU Special Representative and Head of the Delegation of the EU to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Erwan Fouéré, attended.

The SA Council noted that the European Commission in its 2009 Enlargement Package recommended opening of accession negotiations based on the assessment that the country had substantially addressed the key priorities of the Accession Partnership and sufficiently met the political criteria for EU membership. In this regard, the SA Council noted the conclusions of the Council of the European Union adopted on 7-8 December 2009. The SA Council was informed that, in line with those conclusions, the development regarding the country was also raised at the Council of the EU held on 14 June 2010.

The SA Council noted the country's primary objective and strong commitment to open accession negotiations as soon as possible. It was also informed of the Government's dedication to further effective implementation of reforms, particularly in the judiciary, public administration, fight against corruption, economic reforms, to advance the degree of application of EU accession criteria and standards in the country.

P R E S S

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The EU noted that the short-stay visa obligations was waived in December 2009 for biometric passport holders. In the visa liberalisation process the country also demonstrated clear capacity to implement the reforms in questions. The continuous efforts of the national authorities to inform the citizens about the rights and obligations stemming from short term visa-free travel were welcomed.

The SA Council reviewed key developments over the previous year related to the fulfilment of the political criteria. It noted the efforts made to implement the Law on Parliament, adopted last year, as regards the Parliament's role. The EU noted the establishment of a parliamentary Inquiry Committee regarding the incident in Parliament in 1 July. In this context, the SA Council noted that the best way to enhance the political climate is to fully implement the Law on Parliament, to adopt the new Rules of Procedure and to resume the formal coordination meetings between the coordinators of political groups. The EU reiterated the importance of ensuring constructive dialogue between political forces to achieve the sustainable implementation of key reforms and of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. The SA Council was informed that maintaining momentum in reform efforts remains an essential objective for the Government.

Police reform continues to make progress and the ongoing implementation of the new Law on internal affairs is essential to set the basis for a sound human resources management system in the police. The SA Council took note of continued efforts on judicial reform, including the foreseen legislative changes aimed at further strengthening the autonomy, independence, effectiveness and professionalism of the judiciary. In this regard the EU pointed to the utmost importance of ensuring the independence and impartiality of judges and prosecutors. Additional measures in the fight against corruption were discussed, which aim to further reinforce the legal framework, strengthen inter-agency cooperation and build a track record of enforcement. In the conduct of the fight against corruption, political impartiality is essential. The EU noted that legal provisions need to be implemented in practice, eg. as regards the financing of political parties and the checking of declarations of assets and possible conflicts of interest of politicians and officials. Concerning the public administration reform, the SA Council noted the importance of the strengthened legislative framework and encouraged continuous efforts to ensure further transparency, professionalism and independence of public administration. It welcomed the establishment of a special group on the public administration reform under the SAA.

The SA Council underscored that the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) remains a key part of the political criteria and an essential element of democracy and the rule of law as enshrined in the country's constitutional and legal order and it must be fully implemented. The SA Council took note of the Government's commitment to continuously ensure effective enforcement of OFA, notably concerning equitable representation, use of languages, decentralization and ethnic communities' integration through education. The progress in implementing the strategy for equitable representation of ethnic communities in the public sector was welcomed, in particular as regards the Albanian community, while certain other ethnic communities are still under-represented. The EU is concerned by statements by some political leaders that point in the direction of abandonment of OFA. Any violence or threats of violence are unacceptable and incompatible with the values of the European Union. The EU encourages all citizens, and their representatives, to utilise existing democratic mechanisms, including the Parliament, to advance their interests.

The SA Council agreed that media could have an important role in promoting tolerance and better understanding.

The EU recalled that regional co-operation and good neighbourly relations form an essential part of the process of moving towards the EU.

The SA Council noted the measures related to the fulfilment of the economic criteria and the functioning of the market economy. The EU welcomed the fact that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has continued to move closer to becoming a functioning market economy. Privatisation is largely completed, and price and trade liberalisation have been largely accomplished. The EU recognised the country's appropriate macroeconomic policy mix in the context of the global crisis. It also noted the importance of using available resources, in the present economic circumstances, in the most efficient way focusing public spending on purposes with a high value added such as investment in productive capacity. In the area of statistics, the Population Census scheduled for 2011 is particularly important.

Concerning the new Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) the 2009-2011 Multi-Annual Indicative Planning Document (MIPD) for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was adopted on 29 June 2009. For the period 2008-2010, the national programme allocated € 244.3 million to assist the country on its road to European integration. In addition, the country continues to benefit from regional and horizontal programmes. Progress was achieved in the institutional preparations for decentralised implementation of IPA which led to the conferral of management power decisions for three IPA components, while for the remaining two components preparations are on-going.

The SA Council noted a high level of compliance under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. It recalled the Commission's proposal on the transition to the second stage of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, which is now under consideration by the Council's preparatory bodies.

As regards alignment with the acquis, progress was noted in the legal harmonization and in the administrative capacity building in a number of areas. The SA Council welcomed the country's progressive participation in the Community Programs, noting that it also initiated the procedure for participation as observer in the EU Fundamental Rights Agency. It also welcomed the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA) – Revision 2010 and the practice by the authorities to annually update the NPAA on the basis of the Commission's Progress Report.

The EU welcomed the country's continued active participation and the constructive approach in regional cooperation including in initiatives in South Eastern Europe, such as the South East European Cooperation Process, the Regional Cooperation Council and the contribution to the EU ALTHEA mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The SA Council also took note of the completion of the demarcation of the country's border with Kosovo, thus making it the first country of the former Yugoslavia to have achieved this with all its neighbours.