



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**Brussels, 23 May 2013**

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**NOTE**

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from : General Secretariat of the Council  
to : Delegations

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Subject: Summary record of the plenary session of the European Parliament held in  
Strasbourg on 22 May 2013  
**Council and Commission Statements: 2012 progress report on the former  
Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

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Minister Creighton, on behalf of the Council, delivered the speech set out in [Annex I](#).

Mr Füle, on behalf of the Commission, delivered the speech set out in [Annex II](#).

Mr HOWITT (S&D, UK), rapporteur, set out his clear recommendation that accession negotiations for this country should start without further delay. However, he acknowledged that future progress towards Europe had been jeopardised by ethnic tensions last August as well as the political crisis of December 2012 and recalled that his report had been postponed pending an agreement to end the political crisis. He called for substantive progress in the implementation of the March 2013 agreement, in particular concerning the commission of inquiry, the memorandum of understanding and the dialogue for freedom of expression.

He considered that the European Council should reflect on its responsibilities with regard to the current crisis because of the delays in opening accession negotiations. Although he strongly recommended that the June European Council open negotiations, he considered that postponing the decision would be a better outcome than yet another rejection.

### *Contributions on behalf of the groups*

Mr KUKAN (EPP, SK) congratulated the rapporteur and called on the European Council to adopt a decision to open negotiations without delay. In his view, the opening of negotiations would enhance the reforms and modernisation that the country was already implementing. In his view, an integration process would help overcome ethnic and political tensions in the country.

Ms NICOLAI (ALDE, RO) welcomed the report and underlined that the country was waiting for a clear signal from the EU. She criticised the unilateral policies of some MSs which were preventing the EU from moving forward and called on the Union to express a strong political will to open negotiations. As for the reform process, she warned against double standards and recalled the progress already made by the country in the field of ethnic relations and citizenship.

Ms CORNELISSEN (Greens, NL) considered that it was time for negotiations to be opened although she highlighted some shortcomings in the protection of human rights that needed to be addressed.

Mr TANNOCK (ECR, UK) underlined the longstanding status of candidate country of the Former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia, urged the Greek Government to make progress on the name issue, and the Bulgarians to offer the hand of friendship to their Macedonian neighbours.

Mr SALAVRAKOS (EFD, EL) criticised some inaccuracies and contradictions in the report, that in his view concealed the ethnic and democratic problems of the country. In his view, the start of negotiations was not dependent on Greece and Bulgaria. The country should rather cease its provocative attitudes.

Mr CHOUNTIS (GUE, EL) underlined the insufficient progress in the democratic process of the country. He considered that the economic situation had resulted in high rates of unemployment as a consequence, in his view, of the neo liberal policies imposed by the EU.

### *Contributions from individual MEPs*

Some 15 MEPs, including Mr ROUČEK, S&D-CZ, Mr CHATZIMARKAKIS, ALDE- DE, Mr KOWAL, ECR- PL, Mr KACIN, ALDE- SI, Ms PACK, EPP-DE, Mr KELAM, EPP- EE, Mr ZVER, EPP- SI, Mr SCHÖPFLIN, EPP-HU took the floor, mainly supporting the opinions expressed by the group representatives.

Mr KOVATCHEV (EPP, BG) considered that a more friendly approach was expected from the country's authorities towards its neighbours and mentioned the refusal to accept Bulgarian requests to restore cemeteries and historic monuments in the country.

Ms GIANNAKOU (EPP, EL) underlined the fact that the name issue was being used against neighbouring countries and criticised provocative attitudes such as huge statues and the use of historic names.

Ms KOPPA (S&D, EL) considered that the country was not ready to become part of the EU as demonstrated by the events of December 2012 which in her view, called democracy into question. Commissioner FÜLE, in his closing remarks, insisted on the importance of opening accession negotiations, given that the status quo was unsustainable and that the conditions needed to be created for the parties to move forward. For these reasons, in his view, opening negotiations could provide more opportunities also to solve the name issue. It could be made it clear in the negotiating framework that the second stage of the accession negotiations – which means opening various chapters – would not start unless the name issue had been solved.

He concluded by saying that for the Council to take a positive decision, the country must demonstrate the necessary political will. This implied implementation of the political agreement of 1 March and continued efforts to improve neighbourly relations.

Ms CREIGHTON in her closing remarks welcomed the very significant progress which had been achieved by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to date. She remained confident that the country would make further efforts during the rest of this year to achieve further important reforms and said that it continued to be a priority and stated objective of the Irish Presidency to open negotiations with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. A firm commitment to good neighbourly relations was a particular priority for the Council. She therefore encouraged the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to intensify bilateral discussions in order to reach a successful settlement on the outstanding issues, and not least on the issue of the name. She warned both either the country and its neighbours against engaging in a blame game and urged both parties to genuinely engage, and to do so intensively in the weeks ahead.

**Speech by Minister Creighton; Strasbourg, 22 May 2013**

Mr President, I am very grateful for this opportunity to set out the Council's position on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. I would also like to thank this Parliament, and your rapporteur, Richard Howitt in particular, for his valuable work on the issue and for your excellent resolution. Both institutions very much share the same assessment of the situation, and that helps us collectively in our ongoing contacts with the authorities in Skopje.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been a candidate country since December 2005 but of course has had very close relations with the EU since well before then. The country is important in the region, being fully involved in regional initiatives such as the Regional Cooperation Council and the South-East European Cooperation Process.

In its conclusions on enlargement from December 2012 the Council welcomed the progress made in a number of key policy areas. These included the legislative framework for elections, freedom of expression, and public administration. The Council also took note of the review of the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and, as you do in your resolution, encourages the government to move swiftly to the next stage of the review.

The High Level Accession Dialogue (HLAD) has acted as a catalyst for reform. This momentum has to be sustained, and particular attention is needed in the area of the rule of law, including on issues such as freedom of expression, the fight against corruption and inter-ethnic relations and reconciliation.

The Council largely shared the Commission's assessment that the political criteria continue to be sufficiently met and took note of its recommendation that accession negotiations be opened with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

However, maintaining good neighbourly relations is essential, and that has to include a negotiated and mutually-accepted solution to the name issue, under the auspices of the UN. I know this Parliament shares our view that the long-standing discussions on the name issue should be brought to a definitive conclusion as soon as possible. The Council has welcomed the momentum generated by the Greek proposal for a memorandum of understanding. There has also been some positive progress in discussions between the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria.

With a view to a possible decision on opening accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Council invited the Commission to report on progress. Last month the Commission presented that report, which assesses progress on the implementation of EU-related reforms (under the High Level Accession Dialogue) as well as in the area of good neighbourly relations and specifically on the name issue.

The main conclusion of the Commission's report is that the reform process is largely back on track after the political crisis of January-February. Relations with neighbours remain good, and there have been some positive developments in bilateral relations with Bulgaria and Greece. Formal talks on the name issue under the auspices of the UN have also made some progress during the period covered by the report, which also emphasised the importance of the timely implementation of the political agreement of 1 March 2013.

The Council is now considering the Commission's report, with a view to further discussion at the June General Affairs Council. Ireland, as holder of the EU Presidency, will facilitate discussion of the report and will seek to see the issue progress.

In the meantime, it is vital that the political leadership in the country sustains and develops the EU integration process, despite the difficult background and circumstances. I know that Parliament shares this view and that you will use your contacts to help achieve this.

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**Speech by Commissioner Füle; Strasbourg, 22 May 2013**

**Štefan Füle**, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I would like to pay tribute to the quality of the report which has been prepared by your rapporteur, Richard Howitt. I welcome the supportive stance you have taken towards the country's efforts in the accession process. I also share your concern about the risk of prolonging the status quo.

For the purpose of today's debate, let me recall the main conclusions of the Commission's spring report on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. First, the implementation of reforms is ongoing. At the latest meeting of the High-Level Accession Dialogue held in Skopje on 9 April 2013, we noted that action had been taken in relation to almost all the Dialogue targets. Secondly, steps had also been taken on good neighbourly relations, particularly with Bulgaria and Greece.

We were also encouraged by the fact that formal talks on the name issue took on a new momentum in April 2013 with another proposal from the United Nation Secretary-General's Special Representative which he hopes can lead to a breakthrough. Having said this, I remain deeply concerned by the follow-up to the political crisis which affected the country last winter. An agreement was reached on 1 March 2013 to overcome the crisis. This allowed the opposition, SDSM, to return to parliament and participate in the recently held local elections.

However, other elements of this agreement have not yet been fully implemented, in particular the setting up of a committee of inquiry into the events of 24 December 2012, which should make recommendations to avoid a recurrence; the signature of a cross-party memorandum of understanding confirming the will of all parties to continue on the European path; and the resumption of media dialogue with their association of journalists.

While efforts are continuing to get the committee of inquiry up and running, results have been slow; these delays and the limited political dialogue between the parties raise doubts about their commitment to fully implement the 1 March 2013 agreement. I conveyed this message very clearly to Prime Minister Gruevski.

Serbia's and Kosovo's historic agreement has injected new momentum into the enlargement process. This is an opportunity that the region and other countries should not miss. The Serbia-Kosovo deal shows that, where there is political will, a solution can be found. As we know in the European Union, in such instances compromise can lead to greater rewards.