

High Level Accession Dialogue

Skopje 17 September 2012

Conclusions

1. Prime Minister Gruevski and Commissioner Füle chaired the third High Level Accession Dialogue (HLAD) on 17 September. The discussions reviewed overall progress made throughout this process, on the basis of the interim review carried out in June, as regards the reforms in the five priority areas set out in the government's roadmap. These results and all measures taken in the context of the HLAD will be assessed in the upcoming Commission Progress report (10 October).
2. The Commission welcomed the government's adoption of a stock taking report on the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. This report sets out the results achieved so far and makes recommendations for future work. It is a positive example of how to take forward relations between communities in the country, based on the principles of consensus and mutual understanding.
3. The government adopted proposals for a new Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation and for amending the Criminal Code, aimed at strengthening freedom of expression in the media by decriminalising defamation. Other measures taken in this field include, notably, translation of case law and training of judges and journalists on the application of Article 10 of the European Court of Human Rights. Inclusive dialogue with the Association of Journalists will continue, including on strengthening professional standards, labour rights of journalists and government advertising.
4. The government has also adopted a proposal to amend the electoral code, taking into account the ODIHR recommendations, and which aim at improving the legal framework for elections. It is important that there is a broad consensus on such amendments.
5. Measures have been taken on the rule of law, in line with the new approach being followed in the enlargement process. The country participated as observer in the screening of chapters 23 and 24. The overall backlog in the court system has been reduced and efforts will continue as regards the Supreme Court. Amendments are currently before the Parliament, which aim at bringing forward the entry into force of stricter professional requirements for the appointment of judges in higher courts. In the fight against corruption, the systematic verification of conflict of interest statements is underway. Amendments to the Law on Interception of Communications were adopted by the Parliament, which aim at increasing the transparency and effectiveness of this important tool in the fight against organised crime and corruption. The enforcement track record for corruption needs to be closely monitored, including for high-level cases.

6. Preparations for important reforms of public administration have advanced. A new Law on Administration will consolidate the professionalisation of the public administration. This should ensure improved merit based recruitment across the public administration together with respect for the principle of equitable representation.
7. Concerning the strengthening of the market economy, the Law on Foreigners has been amended in order to facilitate the granting of work permits for foreigners. Additional measures have been taken to reduce barriers to market exit, thus strengthening the business environment. An investor's guide was also adopted. The Law on Concessions will be embedded through harmonisation of sectoral legislation, thus strengthening implementation of economic policy. Action will continue to be taken in these fields, notably to develop sound medium term macro-fiscal strategies, strengthen institutional frameworks and address labour market challenges. Youth employment will be targeted through education, vocational training and other programmes.
8. It is important that the inclusive and transparent approach in taking forward the above reforms is maintained. The National Council of European Integration, as well as other stakeholders, including civil society, should continue to be informed and systematically consulted.
9. The High level Accession Dialogue has provided valuable support to the accession process of the country by focusing on key reform priorities. It is not a substitute to the accession negotiations, the opening of which remains a primary objective.
10. Prime Minister Gruevski and Commissioner Füle reiterated the importance of good neighbourly relations with all neighbours and of building on the existing ties and cooperation, including through regional cooperation initiatives. In this regard, the Commission welcomed the current Chairmanship of the South East European Cooperation Process. The talks under the UN auspices for a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution to the name issue should be pursued with increased vigour, as should direct bilateral meetings and contacts. A solution between the two neighbours can be found in the same spirit and based on the same core values that underpin the European Union from its beginnings over 60 years ago to today.
11. The roadmap contains measures that are to be implemented over the short and medium term. The government is committed to implementing the roadmap in full, to conduct regular reviews and make the necessary adaptations as appropriate. The Commission will adopt a Progress Report in October that will build on the High Level Accession Dialogue. We will meet again at the beginning of 2013 to assess the outcome of the European Council and discuss the next steps in the accession process.