



Provisional edition

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Official report of debates

Debate: Supporting a European perspective for the Western Balkans

Mr Aleksandar NIKOLOSKI (North Macedonia, EPP/CD): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear friends,

As Mr. Papandreou correctly points out in his report - surveys show that an increasing number of people in the Western Balkans, especially amongst the youth, are pessimistic about the prospects of EU accession. The European vision is losing its shine. In its place, ethno-nationalism has resurfaced a very worrying development.

What is happening to my country- Macedonia is the best example of this. It was Greece that was vetoing the opening of accession negotiations for years and then since 2020 that is Bulgaria, using its position of member in EU to blackmail Macedonia, denies the existence of the Macedonian nation, questioning the Macedonian culture and history and clamming that the Macedonian language is a dialect of the Bulgarian language. All this Macedonia is pushed to accept in order to open accession talks and may be one day to become member of EU. The rule of unanimity in accession process is misused brutally by Bulgaria. That is why many youngsters lose faith and either leave the country or are asking for alternatives.

In the report is written that Council of Europe welcomes the opening of accession negotiations with Macedonia on 19 July 2022. That is not true! Macedonia did not open accession negotiations only was pushed to change the constitution upon Bulgarian dictate and terms. Without change of the constitution there are no accession negotiations. You will all agree this is brutal intervention into the suzerainty and independence of the country. There is no second example of any other EU or candidate country that faced this pre conditions, this is not European value!

Furthermore Bulgaria uses the same inflammatory discourse as does Vladimir Putin. Putin says there is no Ukrainian nation and language, they are Russian, Bulgarian politicians say there is no Macedonian nation and language, they are Bulgarian, and if Macedonia wants to progress towards EU must accept this!

This is why I call the Council of Europe in this report to recommend opening of accession negotiations for Macedonia without further delays and additional requests. Council of Europe should ask EU to respect its own Copenhagen criteria. The change of the constitution of independent country should not be precondition for accession negotiations. The Council of Europe should ask Bulgaria to stop pressuring on constitutional changes in Macedonia and allow accession talks. EU should use all its mechanisms to enforce this.

In this report:

1. Speeches in English, French, German and Italian are reported in full in English.
2. Speeches in other languages are summarised from the interpretation and indicated by an asterisk (*).
3. Speeches in German and Italian are available in full on the Assembly's website.
4. The text of the amendments is available at the document centre and on the Assembly's website. Only oral amendments or oral sub-amendments are reproduced in the report of debates.
5. Corrections should be handed in at Room 1081 not later than 24 hours after the report has been published.

Only in this act the confidence will be brought back and optimism about the European perspective.

Another important issue is the fight against organized crime and corruption. I applaud the direct wording of the report on this issue. The respect of the rule of law and the fight against corruption is a geostrategic investment in peace, stability and democratic security for the whole of Europe. Unfortunately Macedonia has the most corrupted Government in its history according to the Transparency International reports and I ask the EU and Council of Europe to put pressure on implementing in the priority areas such as the rule of law and good governance, including efficiency, independence and accountability of the judiciary, anti-corruption, public administration reform.

Macedonia should start EU membership negotiations because the citizens of Macedonia deserve it, without any further request and pre conditions by Bulgaria such as the change of the constitution.

Only such an approach can lead to good neighborly relations and friendly relations between the Macedonian and Bulgarian people into the common European family.

Thank you.