



About ACCESSION Log

ACCESSION Log is the new tool, designed and applied by EUROTHINK - Centre for European Strategies, to oversee and assess track record of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, EU-related policy making, implementation of the urgent reform priorities, and regular political dialogue between Macedonia and the European Union. In other words - Macedonia's accession in the EU. ACCESSION Log will also attempt to analyse key events, such as: meetings of the EU Council, meetings of the European Council and other high level meetings; various documents published by the EU in relation to its enlargement policy, as well as global developments that affect EU policies and, consequently, policies in the Republic of Macedonia. Finally, ACCESSION Log will closely follow other processes, policies, documents and events related to Macedonia's paramount priority on joining the EU and NATO.

Under individual entries, ACCESSION Log will analyse, determine benchmarks, propose policy options and advocate for particular solutions. Log entries are envisaged as brief reviews on relevant topics, based on analysis of:

- data obtained from EUROMETER or field surveys conducted by other organizations;
- data obtained from other research and analyses conducted by EUROTHINK or other organizations;
- statements obtained as part of structured interviews with relevant interlocutors, focus group discussions, and EUROTALK sessions;
- documents of the European Union, the European Commission and/or governments of EU member-states, NATO and its members, and documents of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia;
- media news and reports in the Republic of Macedonia and EU member-states.

ПОЛОВИНА ЧЕКОР НАПРЕД

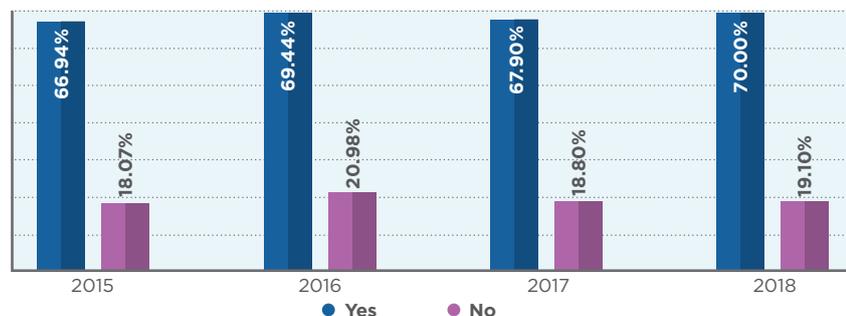
In early 2018, when we discussed the year of chance and the scenario **Camel Through the Eye of Needle**, we enlisted three events or three steps that would be in the focus of attention throughout the year: 1) publication of the **Credible Strategy** on Enlargement with the Western Balkans; 2) EU-Western Balkans **Summit** in Sofia; and 3) **European Council** in June, in Brussels. EC's Credible Strategy on Enlargement with the Western Balkans was published on February 6th this year and it confirmed the European perspective for Macedonia and for the region. EU-Western Balkans Summit will take place within a fortnight and a fortnight has passed from publication of the European Commission's Country Report for Macedonia that also confirmed the European perspective of the Republic of Macedonia. European Commission's Country Report was not among steps enlisted in our scenario developed earlier, but having in mind its timing and its importance, it most certainly represents half step forward.

Fundamentals First

On April 17th 2018,¹ the European Commission published the most recent report for Macedonia.² This 2018 report covers a period of 18 months, having in mind that the last report was published in November 2016. The new period covered by EC's Report implies its alignment with reports and assessments of the Economic Development Program and the European Semester.

As was the case in last two reports, this report also speaks about the principle **Fundamentals First**.³ In that, application of this principle changes the report's approach and establishes different organization of chapters and sections therein. Hence, issues related to the political criterion and the rule of law, including themes such as *democracy, governance, functional institutions, public administration reforms, economy and regional cooperation*, as well as Chapter 23: *Judiciary and Fundamental Rights* and Chapter 24: *Freedom, Security and Justice*, are key priorities under the enlargement process. Compared against previous reports, the approach applied to this year's report is not essentially different, but for the first time chapters 23 and 24 under this report are reconsidered as part of the political criterion and, also for the first time, state-of-affairs under these chapters is presented only in one section of the report.

If on Sunday there is a referendum with the question „Do you support Macedonia's Accession to the  ?“, how would you vote?



¹ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/package_en

² <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417-the-former-yugoslav-republic-of-macedonia-report.pdf>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/eu_trek_teaching_notes_en.pdf

According to the approach applied in the Enlargement Strategy, areas reconsidered under the section **Fundamentals First** include:

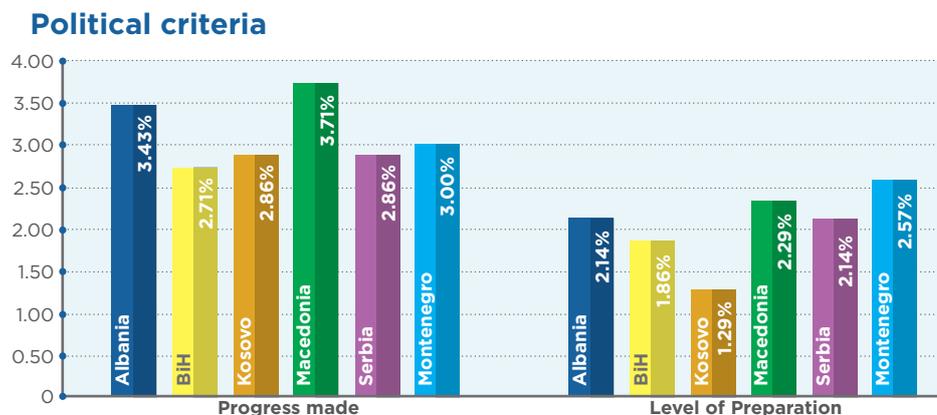
- **Political Criteria and the Rule of Law**, which covers sections on *democracy and elections, functional institutions, civil society, Chapter 23: Judiciary and Fundamental Rights* and *Chapter 24: Freedom, Security and Justice*, as well as *freedom of expression*;
- **Economic Development and Competitiveness**, which covers sections on *economic reforms, competitiveness, jobs, fiscal consolidation* and *inclusive growth*;
- **Public Administration Reforms**, which covers issues such as *political Influence on administration, efficiency and competence, checks-and-balances among different levels of governments*, etc.
- **Regional Cooperation**, which includes the agenda on connectivity within the Western Balkan region, good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation.

END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

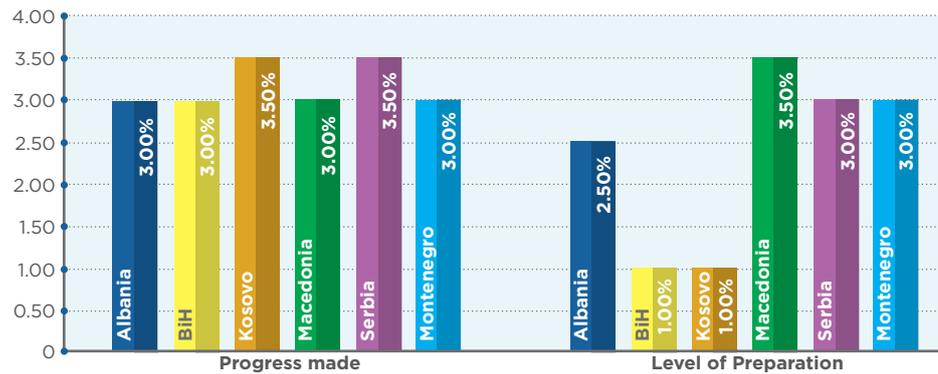
If we consider candidate countries as students, then the reporting period would be the school year, meaning that reports published by the European Commission are end-of-year report-cards about performance of candidate countries, while the enlargement strategy serves as the class report-card developed by the head teacher about deportment of students.

Therefore, when writing its report for this year, the Commission uses descriptive assessments to indicate the level of alignment and progress achieved. In that, the level of alignment is assessed on the following scale: **early stage of preparation, some level of preparation, moderately prepared, good level of preparation, and well advanced**. On the other hand, five categories used to assess progress achieved in the last year are: **backsliding, no progress, some progress, good progress, and very good progress**.

Certificate of Appraise for Good Students



Economic criteria

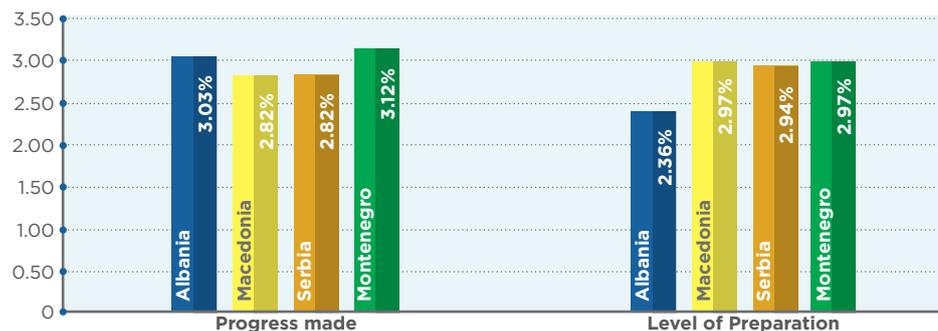


In its report, the Commission does not fully distinguish the period from the last report published until formation of the new government and the period afterwards, but it continuously underlines the period after formation of the now government as the timeframe where it locates progress made.

According to logics of student performance assessment, school year and department, this year the student country Macedonia demonstrated the best success under the political criterion. Its success, compared to respective successes of Serbia and Montenegro, which are already negotiating for membership, is more than noticeable. Strictly focusing on the political criterion, even the country's level of preparations is satisfactory and ranks us behind Montenegro, but before Serbia. Moving to the field of the economic criterion, Macedonia is convincingly the best prepared among all countries in the Western Balkan, although it had not achieved particularly good success in the last reporting period. Finally, even in terms of chapters related to EU *acquis*, where Macedonia realistically demonstrated poorest progress in the past period, the country's preparedness is on the same rank with Montenegro, and slightly better prepared than Serbia, i.e. the progress achieved is on the same rank with Serbia and slightly lower compared to progress made by Montenegro.

It is obvious that the Commission is impressed with the country's progress, as witnessed in the enlargement strategy: *"The political will to move forward is once again clearly present and a positive change in the political mindset has been seen across society, the lack of which had been a major impediment to reforms in the recent years"*.⁴ Having this in mind, it should not come as surprise that the European Commission decided to recommend start of accession negotiations with Macedonia, convinced that in order to solidify progress, the same must be welcomed, and in order to make progress permanent, the same should be put in the framework of accession negotiations.

Approximation of EU Legislation



⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417_strategy_paper_en.pdf

THE REPORT IN THREE POINTS

Many words used throughout the report are not clear to ordinary citizens, i.e. citizens cannot understand various recommendations or remarks made by the European Commission, nor could they recognize the source or the basis for their emphasis. Experience from the past years shows that debates initiated around the report are usually short-lived. Connoisseurs of these matters remain focused on the report for longer period of time or even more essentially, but the public discourse wears off rather quickly. This year, the report is no longer discussed by the end of fortnight from its publication. However, having in mind that report vocabulary and, in particular, its “clear” recommendation, the short debate was exceptionally emotional, leaving us today with numerous expectations.

It is clear that the report is not intended for broad audiences, because it implies document drafted by the Brussels bureaucracy. Bureaucrats at EU institutions in Brussels, as well as civil servants at capitals in EU member-states are quite familiar with phraseology used in the report. However, in order to bring it closer to ordinary citizens here we interpret the report in terms of three straightforward conclusions.

Clear and Unconditional Recommendation⁵

After long period of time, Macedonia again received recommendation to start accession negotiations. Unlike the last recommendation, and especially unlike the recommendation issued in 2016, this year’s recommendation is “**clear and unconditional**”. The phrase “clear and unconditional” means that the Commission expects the Council to immediately reconsider the recommendation and to take positive conclusion by deciding to open accession negotiations. However, this game of words is understandable only to connoisseurs of EU matters, while it does not mean anything to ordinary citizens.

In order to make matters clear, the recommendation holds exceptional value, as it creates benefits for citizens. In the last three years, Macedonia was faced with protracted political crisis which, in the words of the European Commission, amounted to the most severe political crisis since the 2001 conflict. Crisis resolution was not simple, and often the state fell into deeper crisis. Only 18 months ago, in its previous report, the European Commission qualified Macedonia as **state capture**, which is a euphemism used to depict authoritarian and corrupted system wherein narrow interests of powerful individuals took primacy before the public interest.

It might sound odd, but the European Commission has not forgotten any of the many evils brought about by the previous government and they are all featured in the report. EC’s Report opens with the organized persecution against critically-oriented civil society organizations and the international community as part of the so-called **de-Sorosization** process, whereby the state’s entire repressive apparatus was abused to intimidate, silence and even close this sector, and continues with the biggest attack on democracy that happened one year prior to report’s publication, i.e. exactly one year on the day this entry is drafted. Turning point in the report is the political violence encouraged by actors who, for more than one decade, were building state capture, and who, on April 27th 2017, attempted to threaten constitutional order by storming the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia and engaging in violence that created feeling of uncertainty and fear among citizens.⁶

⁵ https://kanal5.com.mk/vesti_detail.asp?ID=152327

⁶ <http://www.pravda.gov.mk/documents/KRIVICEN%20ZAKONIK%20precisten%20%20tekst.pdf>

Moreover, the report duly notes positive changes in the past year, reforms, inclusiveness, dialogue, problem resolution and vision for the future. Hence, there is evident difference compared to the previous report. Today, Macedonia is free society with visible political will for reforms that had been missing in the past. Nevertheless, the report does not depict Macedonia as the land of milk and honey. On the contrary, it is depicted in more realistic terms as a country facing different problems. In that, the most important difference is seen in the fact that society and institutions do not ignore problems, but address them head on. European Commission notes that state capture is starting to be released, but remarks that damages from the past cannot be easily corrected. Finally, in the absence of successful stories, Macedonia is the role model that should be graciously rewarded.

Hunger for Successful Stories

EC's Report stands to witness that Brussel is "hungry" for stories of success. This year marks the end of the term of office for the current composition of the European Parliament and the Commission College. At the EU elections in May 2019, all political groups would want to depict themselves as having successfully dealt with all challenges during their mandate. Of course, they would want to leave certain success legacy to the next Commission College that will be discussed also in the enlargement policy framework. The success story they could present is exactly here, in Macedonia, and could be attributed to Commissioner Johannes Hahn, High Representative Federica Mogherini, and President of the European Council Donald Tusk. Judging on intensity of their involvement and regularity in the last several years, we can freely speak of dedication and decisiveness to deliver that success.

In the previously published Credible Strategy on Enlargement with the Western Balkans, all countries in the region are described as systems demonstrating elements of state capture. Hence, the strategy anticipates series of instruments that should eliminate these elements, but it sounds rather paradoxical to expect elites that have captured their states to change their behaviour. In other words, the actual question for the region is how to release the states and capture the momentum. Macedonia's story is quite different, and that is duly noted in the report. The combination of ambitious and rather initiative-prone foreign policy, packed internal reform agenda, and several practices of the new government have all contributed for Macedonia's image in Brussels to be dramatically changed, giving rise to hope that there are political elites in the Balkan that promote different behaviour. This new hope, but also the possibility to attribute such success to themselves is the procedure which Brussels should generously reward.

Not the Time for Triumphalism

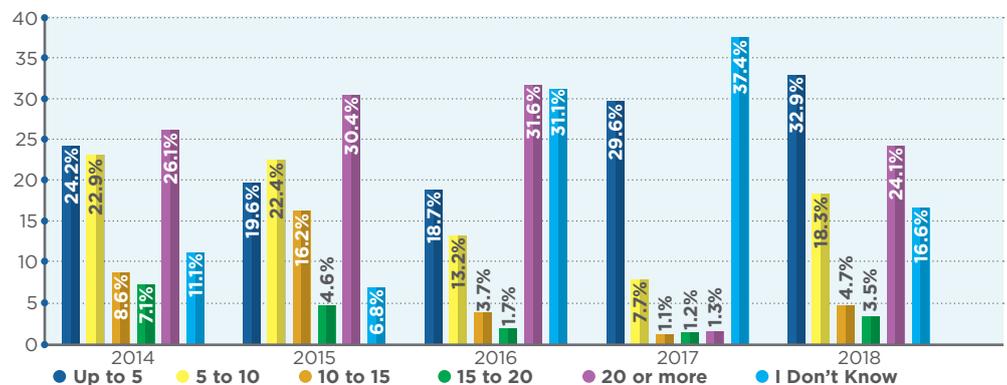
The unconditional recommendation and positive undertone of the report provide an excellent occasion for celebration. However, the fact remains that EC's Report is particularly realistic and depicts matters as they are, giving full and realistic assessment of the level of preparations, as well as progress achieved. In addition, the report sections on chapters related to EU acquis still feature numerous remarks that serve as indicator of the scope of work to be delivered.

In the next period, initiatives to restore the rule of law and democracy will have to be accompanied with reforms that imply tangible improvements in the lives of citizens, that strategy is being developed to support the vision for economic development in the state. On the other hand, the public administration will have to be improved in order to respond not only to citizens' expectations, but also to requirements of the process ahead of us. Hence, there is no time for euphoria, but rather for a toast that would be followed with rolling up the sleeves and new cycle of work. The clear recommendation and positive undertone in EC's Report should be perceived as encouragement from Brussels for Macedonia to continue on the road it has paved and to reach the final destination in the next years.

WHAT NEXT!?

EC's Report is here, Macedonia is no longer state capture, and positive changes are felt in the society, supported by the reform agenda and the country's approximation to the European Union. The last public opinion survey as part of #EUROMETER was conducted in the period May 5th to 22nd 2018 and its results show that one third of citizens in Macedonia, accounting for 32.90% of all respondents, have unrealistic expectations that Macedonia will join the European Union in the next 5 years the latest. Such expectation is highly unrealistic, but this figure is increased by 10% compared to results from November 2017 when the last public opinion survey was conducted.

How long would it take Macedonia to join the EU?



Macedonia's accession in the EU could realistically happen within a timeframe of 10 years. Last public opinion surveys show trends on growing support among citizens in Macedonia which the government should utilize and translate into reforms, laws, building capacity and functionality of institutions, successful track record, etc. #EUROMETER2018 shows that expectations for Macedonia to

become member of the European Union in a period of 10 years are shared by more than half of citizens in Macedonia.

Therefore, in expectation of the next step, i.e. EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia that should happen in two weeks, and the last step in this stage, i.e. European Council in late June, in Brussels, the time is ripe to start discussing what next!?

- 1) It is more than clear that **reforms must continue**, in particular because only sustainable reforms and stability of the reform process will persuade EU member-states that Macedonia is prepared to join the EU.
- 2) Additional confirmation of Macedonia's commitment to deliver reforms and thereby enjoy benefits of EU membership will be opening of **public debate about the negotiation structure** and that perfect balance of roles played by the government, the parliament and the broader civil society will contribute to building consensus in the society and will strengthen the support, but also the confidence of citizens.
- 3) Finally, in parallel with the debate about the structure for negotiations, discussion should be opened about the profile of the **chief negotiator** and his/her mandate, as well as members of the core negotiation team. Their expertise must not be questioned, just as their broader acceptance and preparedness to handle that challenge.

End of entry #3

