

Brussels, 9 November 2005

The Commission recommends candidate status for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Today the European Commission adopted its Opinion¹ on the application for EU membership of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The Commission recommends that the Council should grant the status of candidate country to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The Commission considers that negotiations for accession to the European Union should be opened with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia once it has reached a sufficient degree of compliance with the membership criteria.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia applied for EU membership on 22 March 2004. The Commission today adopted its Opinion on this application.

Presenting the Opinion, Olli Rehn, Commissioner for Enlargement, said: "Only a few years after a major security crisis, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia today is a stable democracy and a functioning multi-ethnic state. This is a remarkable achievement. The country has also made important progress towards European integration. The Commission welcomes this progress and recommends that the Council should grant candidate status to the country."

The candidate status is a political recognition of a closer relationship between the EU and the country on its way towards membership. The Commission considers that negotiations for accession to the European Union should be opened with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia once it has reached a sufficient degree of compliance with the membership criteria.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is well on its way to comply with the political criteria for EU membership. It is a functioning democracy, with stable institutions which generally guaranteeing the rule of law and the respect for fundamental rights. The implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, signed in August 2001 to put an end to the very serious political and security crisis which was developing in the country, has been a major achievement. Solid commitment and very significant efforts have been demonstrated by all parties concerned. It has opened a process to build an integrated multi-ethnic society and guarantee the stability of the country, thus creating a positive environment for integration with the EU.

However, the country needs to make additional efforts to implement reforms in the judiciary and the police, to strengthen the effectiveness of the fight against corruption, and to improve the electoral process.

¹ The Opinion is an analysis of the country's capacity to meet the criteria set by the Copenhagen European Council of 1993 and the conditions set for the Stabilisation and Association Process for the Western Balkans.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has taken important steps towards establishing a functioning market economy. However, much remains to be done to enable the country to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union. In order to reach higher economic growth and competitiveness, the business climate must be improved and the country must become more attractive for domestic and foreign investors.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has made significant efforts to align its legislation with EU rules particular in the areas of the internal market and trade. However, the country faces major challenges in implementing and enforcing the legislation. Overall, administrative and judicial capacity remains weak in many areas.

The Commission will closely monitor developments in all areas in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It will present a report to the Council on the progress achieved by the country by the end of 2006.