

Republic of Macedonia

36. The Council welcomes the further progress made by the Republic of Macedonia in key reforms area and that the country fulfils its commitments under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. It also welcomes the improvement of the conduct of the June parliamentary elections which were competitive, transparent and well-administered throughout the country. However, further efforts are needed in order to promote and safeguard fundamental rights, in particular as regards freedom of expression in the media, independence of the judiciary, reform of public administration and fight against corruption and improving the business environment- which continue to represent significant challenges. The Council welcomes any fresh impetus given to the reform process by the new government and encourages it to intensify efforts. The implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement remains an essential element of democracy and the rule of law in the country.

37. The Council broadly shares the Commission's assessment of the country's sufficient fulfilment of the political criteria and notes that the Commission has further reiterated its recommendation that accession negotiations should be opened with the Republic of Macedonia. The Council is ready to return to the matter during the next Presidency.

38. Maintaining good neighbourly relations, including a negotiated and mutually accepted solution to the name issue, under the auspices of the UN, is essential. The Council looks forward to the ongoing high-level dialogue bringing results shortly.