

Republic of Macedonia

38. The Council welcomes the fact that the EU agenda remains the country's strategic priority. The country has achieved a high level of alignment with the legislative acquis. However, there are serious concerns about increasing politicisation of state institutions and growing shortcomings with regard to the independence of the judiciary and media freedoms. Failure to deliver on these issues has damaged the sustainability of reforms. The Council urges the authorities to take decisive action to rapidly address these concerns.

39. Recurrent political crises between government and opposition parties have showed the need for more constructive and inclusive political dialogue. It is the responsibility of both government and opposition to ensure that political debate takes place primarily in parliament and to contribute to creating the conditions for its proper functioning. As regards the interethnic situation, greater trust between the communities needs to be built. The review of the Ohrid Framework Agreement needs to be completed rapidly and its recommendations implemented.

40. As set out in the European Council conclusions of June 2008 and the General Affairs and External Relations Council conclusions of December 2008, maintaining good neighbourly relations, including a negotiated and mutually accepted solution to the name issue, under the auspices of the UN, remains essential. There is a need to bring the longstanding discussions on the name issue to a definitive conclusion without delay. Resolute action is required. In light of the overall importance of maintaining good neighbourly relations, the Council notes the continued high level contacts between the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria and looks forward to their translation into concrete actions and results.

41. The Council broadly shares the Commission's assessment that the political criteria continue to be sufficiently met on the basis of cumulative progress achieved and takes note of the Commission's recommendation that accession negotiations be opened with the Republic of Macedonia. With a view to a possible decision of the European Council to open accession negotiations with Republic of Macedonia, the Council will revert to the issue anytime in 2015, on the basis of an update by the Commission on implementation of reforms, including in the context of the High Level Accession Dialogue, and on tangible steps taken to promote good neighbourly relations and to reach a negotiated and mutually accepted solution to the name issue.