

Republic of Macedonia

1. Reaffirming its conclusions regarding the Republic of Macedonia adopted in December 2014 and in April 2015, the EU commitment under the Thessaloniki agenda and the candidate status of the Republic of Macedonia, the Council reiterates its grave concern at the situation in the country, in particular the ongoing political crisis.
2. The Council notes positively the efforts by local party leaders in recent meetings to seek and reach solutions and in this context welcomes the facilitation by Commissioner Hahn as well as by Members of the European Parliament.
3. The Council notes, as a significant first step in addressing the political crisis, the agreement facilitated in Skopje on 2 June 2015. This agreement sets out commitments by the leaders of the main political parties to address serious rule of law concerns and to remain committed to the country's EU accession process and democratic principles, including by maintaining good inter-ethnic relations through the full implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and by strengthening good neighbourly relations. The Council considers the 2 June agreement the basis for future discussions. The Council urges the political parties - in the interest of the citizens and the country - to assume their respective responsibilities and take immediate measures towards a sustainable solution, constructively engage in political dialogue and continue efforts to restore trust in the institutions.
4. The Council calls upon all parties to honour their 2 June agreement and implement all recommendations of the Commission, starting with the urgent reform priorities, in relation to systemic rule of law issues confirmed by or arising out of the current crisis, including in relation to breaches of fundamental rights, judicial freedom, media freedom, elections, corruption, politicisation of state institutions and state/party blurring and failures of oversight. The implementation of these recommendations will be closely monitored by the Commission. Electoral reform in line with recommendations by OSCE/ODIHR is urgently required and will, in conjunction with initial systemic reforms, contribute to ensuring a level playing field ahead of future elections, the free and fair conduct of which will be an important indicator of reforms in this regard. It is, moreover, necessary to ensure as soon as possible a thorough and independent investigation of the material revealed and any criminal wrongdoing, with full regard for due process, the principle of the independence of the judiciary and the presumption of innocence.
5. The Council looks forward to the session of the Stabilisation and Association Council in July where it will expect detailed reporting on concrete actions undertaken and foreseen in the next months.
6. Stressing the need for the Republic of Macedonia to make swift and tangible progress towards fulfilling urgent reform priorities in the framework of the established conditionality and in line with its 16 December 2014 and taking into account its 21 April 2015 Conclusions, the Council reaffirms the continued EU engagement, including through regular reporting by the Commission and the EEAS on the situation in the country, inter alia urgent reform priorities, and on the country's commitment to the EU agenda, and to the enlargement process emanating from its candidate status. The Council remains seized of this issue and will revert to it in the next months.