



The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:

A 'fascinating blend of cultures' is re-joining the European fold



Goce Solev

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a venerable territory with what European Commission President Romano Prodi has called 'a long and rich history' (1). Part of the ancient kingdom of Macedon, it was a Roman and then a Byzantine province, part of the Slavic medieval Bulgarian Empires, part of the Turkish Ottoman Empire from the 14th to 20th centuries, then part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and, finally, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The passage of peoples and time through this crossroads of south-eastern Europe has created a country that combines Bulgarian, Serb, Albanian and Greek cultures, and both Orthodox Christianity and Islam.

Today it is a country determined to re-join the European fold and already some way down the road towards eventual membership of the European Union (EU). This destiny, the country's main aim since the break-up of the former Yugoslav federation, was assured at the Thessaloniki European summit in June 2003 — an event that marked a crucial turning point for the region as a whole. In their 'Thessaloniki declaration', the leaders of the EU Member States and western Balkan countries solemnly declared that the Balkan countries' future is in the European Union. For their part, the EU leaders also promised the Union's firm support for the region's integration.

Making a good start, despite major political disturbances ...

Unfortunately, this green and beautiful country also has its problems: ethnic tensions continue to lie near the surface and the aftermath of the Kosovo crisis caused major political upheavals in 2001. Nevertheless, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was still the first country of the region to sign a stabilisation and association agreement with the EU, in April 2001, in the framework of the EU's stabilisation and association process, which is the overall EU policy framework for the countries of the western Balkans. In this context, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is gradually assuming the main responsibilities of EU membership, bringing its legal and economic framework into line with that of the EU, strengthening cooperation with its neighbours, and so on. Amongst other benefits, the agreement, entered into force on 1 April 2004, provides for almost totally free access to the EU market for exports from the country.

(1) 'The Road to Europe': speech to the Parliament in Skopje, 21 February 2003.

With support from the EU, the political situation is also increasingly stable and democratic — a trend illustrated by the parliamentary elections in September 2002, from



Archive of the European Agency for
Reconstruction

which a multi-ethnic coalition government emerged. All the major political parties expressed political support for the process of EU integration and the country of Macedonia submitted formally its application to join the EU on 22 March 2004.

... but there is still work to be done

For the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to continue to progress towards the EU, the reform process needs to be stepped up. The framework agreement signed in 2001 to prevent a full-scale crisis between the two main communities in the country has to be fully implemented. One of its most complex and far reaching provisions, the 'decentralisation' of administration, has yet to be achieved. This is important not just to bring greater stability to the country but also to ensure that the government of the country can fulfil all the tasks required of a functioning democracy based on the rule of law.

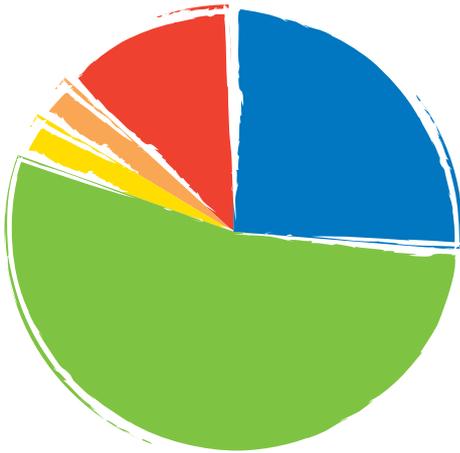
A crucial contributory factor to this process is a strong economic performance, since only with a healthy business climate and economic growth will the government be able to meet the cost of the reform processes required.

How the EU is fulfilling its promise to help

Between 1992 and 2000, the EU contributed some EUR 475 million to support the efforts by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to implement the reforms required under the stabilisation and association process and, one day, join the EU. The main areas of activity sponsored include those listed below.

- **Inter-ethnic relations and civil society** — fostering better relations between different ethnic groups by funding civil society projects.
- **Local government development** — enhancing local government and the dialogue between central and local government and through small projects to develop and improve water supply, sewage, roads and public buildings.
- **Justice and home affairs** — strengthening the country's judicial system and helping it improve internal and regional security.
- **Trade promotion** — helping the country to improve its exports, align its legislation with the Community, and improve market access, quality standards and controls.
- **Supporting private enterprise** — providing credit to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (over 600 loans awarded, creating some 2 500 jobs).
- **Education** — support for the South-East Europe University (SEEU) in Tetovo, inter-university exchanges under the EU Tempus programme and development of school curricula.
- **Transport** — funding improvement of important transport infrastructure.
- **Social welfare** — helping the Minister of Labour and Social Policy to develop social welfare policies in line with the EU's best examples.
- **Environment** — supporting development of national strategies for wastewater and solid waste and wider national environmental policy.

**CARDS allocation 2002-04
(by priority sector)**



EU financial assistance provided through CARDS (Community assistance for reconstruction, development and stabilisation) underpins the objectives and mechanisms of the stabilisation and association process.

Priority sectors	Million EUR
Justice and home affairs	34.7
Economic and social development	70.8
Environment, natural resources	3.0
Democracy and rule of law	11.0
Others (*)	16.5
Total	136.0

(*) Running costs of European Agency for Reconstruction: 13.5 — Reserve: 3.

The road is long, but at the end is the prospect of EU membership

With this support and matching efforts from their side, the government and people of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have real prospects of achieving EU membership in good time. This is important not only for the country but also for the region as a whole, because, as President Prodi told the Parliament in Skopje, on 21 February 2003, 'The overcoming of age-old divisions is the driving force behind the European integration process' and, conversely, 'European integration is the way to overcome certain attitudes and standpoints Europe has inherited from centuries of history'.



Goce Solev



Where can I find more information?

Further information on the EU's relations with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the other countries of the western Balkans is available from the Commission's dedicated website:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/index.htm

If you have a specific question concerning the European Commission's external relations policies, please e-mail the 'Relex feedback' mailbox through the following web address:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/feedback/question2.htm

For other questions on the European Union, you can contact Europe Direct by e-mail through the following web address:

<http://europedirect-cc.cec.eu.int/websubmit/?lang=en>

or by telephone, by dialling the single freephone number:

00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (from any country within the European Union),

or the chargeable number:

(32-2) 29-99696 (from other countries or via certain mobile telephone operators).

European Commission
Directorate-General for External Relations
Rue de la Loi, 200
B-1049 Brussels
Fax (32-2) 29-92198

EuropeAid Co-operation Office
Rue de la Loi, 200
B-1049 Brussels
Fax (32-2) 29-67482
http://europa.eu.int/comm/europaid/projects/cards/index_en.htm

Delegation of the European Commission to
the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
1000 Skopje, Marsal Tito 12
Tel. (389-2) 12 20 32 • Fax (389-2) 12 62 13
<http://www.delmkd.cec.eu.int>

European Agency for Reconstruction — Headquarters
GR-54626 Thessaloniki — Egnatia 4
Tel. (30) 23 10 50 51 00 • Fax (30) 23 10 50 51 72
<http://www.ear.eu.int>