



#ForumEuropaeum

INVITATION

MACEDONIA'S EUROPEAN ACCESSION STORY 2.0

Re-examining expectations, realities and possibilities.

The European Policy Institute (EPI) - Skopje, has the honour to invite you to participate at the **Conference "Macedonia's European accession story 2.0"** that will be held on the 29th September 2017 (Friday) at 12:30pm in Hotel Holiday inn, Skopje.

RSVP at 02/3280 100 or via e-mail contact@epi.org.mk by September 27, 2017 (Wednesday)

12:30 – 13:00

Registration and press statement

13:00 – 13:15

Introductory speeches

-Dr. Simonida Kacarska, Director, EPI

FIRST SESSION:

13:15 – 14:45

MACEDONIA AND THE EU - A SECOND CHANCE

-Radmila Sekerinska, Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and Minister of Defence

-Dr. Antoaneta Dimitrova, Associate Professor, Leiden University

-Nikola Poposki, Member of Parliament and former Minister of Foreign Affairs

-Dr. Adam Fagan, Professor, Head of School, Queen Mary University

-Dr. Malinka Ristevska Jordanova, EPI

Moderator: Dr. Ardita Abazi Imeri, EPI

14:45 – 15:00

Coffee break

SECOND SESSION:

15:00 – 16:15

KNOW THY NEIGHBOUR – NEW GOVERNMENT, NEW GOOD NEIGHBOURLY ENGINEERING, HOW SUSTAINABLE?

-Dr. Fatmir Besimi, former Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia in charge of European Affairs

-Juliana Nikolova, Centre for Policy Modernisation, Sofia

-Tobias Flessenkemper, Senior Fellow & Balkans Project Director, CIFE, Nice/France

-Dimitar Belchev, former diplomat

-Saso Klekovski, independent consultant

Moderator: Aleksandar Jovanoski, EPI

16:15 – 16:30

Conclusions: Arbenita Ismani Sakipi, President of the Assembly of EPI

16:30 – 17:00

Cocktail

Interpretation: Macedonian, Albanian, English



THINK FUND
SUPPORTING POLICY RESEARCH

Aim

The aim of this round table is to encourage an open and constructive discussion between state and non-state actors on the current Macedonian momentum. The new government has committed to repave the path towards EU integration and advance the relations with the neighbours, using bilateral cooperation as its tool. Yet, it is faced with the delicate task to balance between adhering to the EU standards, the sensitive regional context, and the need to adopt contextually relevant reforms and strategies. With this in mind, the discussion will focus on the available tools to devise a new trajectory for sustainable solutions in order to remedy deeply rooted systemic problems.

Background

Last year during our annual conference, we spoke about the, at that time, never-ending political crisis. This situation was finally reflected in the 2016 European Commission report, which defined Macedonia as a captured state. Apart from the deteriorating political situation, the bilateral cooperation and dialogue with Greece had completely stalled. In addition, the relations with Bulgaria, had also taken a negative turn.

On the 11th of December 2016, early parliamentary elections were held. The tight results led to forming a coalition government, disputed by the former party in power and culminating with attacks in the Parliament on the 27th of April. The international community unanimously condemned the attacks, naming them as organized attacks and ultimately a collapse of democracy.

The new government was finally formed on the 1st of June. Although still in its early days, it has committed to free the institutions, regain the trust of the citizens and bring the country back to its Euro-Atlantic path. Moreover, the ministers of the new government have engaged in fostering friendly bilateral talks with our neighbours. In early August, the prime ministers of Macedonia and Bulgaria signed a treaty on good neighbourly relations, which was followed with great discussion and speculation in the public. At the same time, Prime Minister Zaev used his first visit to Brussels to tackle the name issue and announce that “if we have friendly relations and a good approach, then a solution is feasible”. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence Sekerinska and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Dimitrov also reopened the NATO question, pushing for the Republic of Macedonia to enter the Alliance under the provisional reference. In addition, Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs Osmani defined two trajectories – one for the bilateral relations with the neighbours, and the other aiming to achieve a national consensus for EU reforms at home.

With all this in mind, we have a moment for a new start. However, the momentum needs to be used wisely, as “mistakes of the past should not be repeated and one form of state capture must not be replaced by another”. Reforms should be properly planned in order to be truly sustainable. The European Union, both through the actions of its key Member States and institutions has been vocally supportive of the domestic efforts and actions to return the country on the EU accession trajectory. Yet, the question remains whether there is sufficient will and interest in the EU to assist Macedonia in a strategic manner. This would require support in tackling the democratic backsliding, capitalising on its strengths such as its alignment with the EU acquis and standards, but foremost removing the roadblocks on the way to accession. Strategic partnerships such as the ones recently discussed with other candidates in the region might be one way forward in this direction.

1 | 2017 Report of the Senior Experts' Group on systemic Rule of Law issues in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/2017.09.14_seg_report_on_systemic_rol_issues_for_publication.pdf

