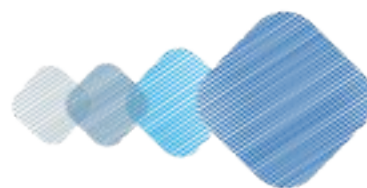


FROZEN RECOMMENDATION

Analysis of the European
Commission 2015
Progress Report
on the
Republic of Macedonia

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Frozen and conditional recommendation

The recommendation for start of EU accession negotiations in the 2015 Progress Report of the Republic of Macedonia is frozen and conditional upon: the full implementation of the June/July Political agreement and the Urgent Reform Priorities, by the holding of the elections in April 2016, the earliest.

In the 2015 Enlargement Strategy the Commission finds the following:

In the light of the progress made so far in the implementation of the June/July political agreement, the Commission is prepared to extend its recommendation to open accession negotiations with the Republic of Macedonia. This shall, however, be conditional on the continued implementation of the June/July political agreement and substantial progress in the implementation of the urgent reform priorities. This issue shall be addressed again after the elections.

It is obvious that the Commission skillfully packed and conditioned the recommendation, having in mind the political happenings and debates in the country. A compromise has been made among the critical points and the need to give impetus to reform. As always, there is space for different interpretations on the part of the political actors. Concerning the reform agenda and with the aim to avoid different interpretation of what would follow in the coming 6 months, Commissioner Hahn stated that "not all could be done, but a lot could be done and it will be evaluated." This statement does also not provide a clear picture and leaves space for different interpretations.

Still, in the form in which it is given, the recommendation shall not be a subject to consideration at the meetings of the Council of Ministers in December 2015, due to the fact that fulfillment of the abovementioned conditions is expected until April 2016.

Having in mind the abovementioned, **we consider that the Republic of Macedonia does not have a recommendation for start of accession negotiation at the moment, and the same could be renewed following the implementation of the Przino agreement and the urgent reform priorities until the elections in April 2016.**¹

¹This was confirmed by Commissioner Hahn, at the press conference held on 10.11.2015, when he stated that the Commission is ready to propose again the full recommendation after April 2016, provided that there will be progress made.

Report in the course of the most severe political crisis since 2001

The Commission stresses that the Republic of Macedonia is in the most severe political crisis since 2001, as well as that following of the publication of the intercepted communications, there are findings that suggest breaches of fundamental rights, media freedom and elections, as well as interference with judicial independence, as well as politicisation and corruption in many fields.

The Macedonian government, the parliament and relevant oversight bodies failed to react adequately to the revelations of the published intercepted communications.

At the same time, it is estimated that the Macedonian government, the parliament and relevant oversight bodies failed to react adequately to the revelations. The Commission stresses that it is necessary to have legal sanctions and political measures for dealing with the findings of the intercepted communications instead of introduction of legal amendments.

The Commission in the framework of the political criteria includes the issues of **oversight of the intelligence services**, which was already implied in the 2014 Report (see appendix Political criteria). In any case, the referencing of oversight over the armed and intelligence services in the framework of the political criteria was usual in the earlier stages of accession and it represents a step back in the democratic maturity of one society.

Old-new approach with more direct criticism and recommendations

The European Commission starts the implementation of a new approach in the preparation of the progress reports for the countries included in the enlargement process with the 2015 Enlargement strategy. For all the acceding countries, the Commission defines key areas which are subject to additional monitoring: **Rule of law and fundamental rights (including the functioning of the judiciary, corruption, organized crime and freedom of expression), economic criteria, public administration reform, as well as three chapters related to public procurement, statistics and financial control.**

These areas follow the principle adopted last year called „*fundamentals first*“ with the aim to show real results in the key chapters (23: judiciary and fundamental rights, 24: freedom, security and justice, economic governance and public administration reform). In all these, a detailed approach of situation assessment is performed through the analysis of the legal and institutional framework as well as the results. **What is worrying is the fact that precisely in these key areas Macedonia is stagnating and/or backsliding, as it is delineated below.**

The new writing style of the reports ensures greater transparency of the enlargement process itself. The country is unable to have a more clear overview of the current state of affairs in the sense of preparation for fulfillment of the membership criteria. What is most characteristic for this report is the inclusion of a harmonized reporting and a five-tier assessment scale for the progress made in the previous 12 months and the level of preparation.²

The terms which are used for the progress achieved are: backsliding, no progress, some progress, good progress, very good progress.

² Previously more nuanced assessments were used – see appendix.

The terms which are used for the level of alignment are: early stage, some level of preparation, moderate level of preparation, good level of preparation and well advanced.

Nevertheless, the Commission's methodology and the manner of assessing are not significantly different from the current practice. In fact, the Commission is attempting to use uniform terminology although the process and the mechanisms behind it remain the same. EPI based its analyses in the past several years on the same methodology with the use of gradation of assessments in the chapters. This allows us to implement the current analysis according to the same methodology as well as to ensure comparability with the assessments from the previous years.³

Despite the fact that the first impression is that the new methodology of the EC ensures greater transparency and clarity, we identified certain deficiencies in our initial analysis. The selection of pilot areas and the kind of meaning they have must be subject to an additional analysis.

Backsliding and deepening of the gap between the legislation and reality

Nevertheless, the new approach of the Commission this year illustrates in a more successful manner between the good alignment of the legislature and the real state of play in the aspirant countries for membership. With the new approach the Commission makes and attempt to overcome the criticism of several years for formal assessment of the progress made through the direction towards the actual conditions.

The Commission determines backsliding in the judicial system, freedom of expression and management of public finances (fiscal discipline).

In the case of the Republic of Macedonia, this report stresses more the gap between the good level of legal alignment (having in mind the relations with the EU) and the backsliding in the key political and economic criteria. The level of alignment, as it is stated by EPI in its reports from the past years, is correct, having in mind the fact that the Republic of Macedonia started the alignment with the European legislature far earlier than the other countries in the region.

On the other hand, the Commission uses the

³See EPI previous reports:

Initial analysis of the Report of the European Commission on the progress of the Republic of Macedonia in 2013, available at: http://epi.org.mk/docs/prvicna_analiza_na_izvestajot_na_ek_za_napredokot_na_rm_za_2013.pdf

Overshadowed recommendation, Analysis of the Report of the European Commission on the progress of the Republic of Macedonia in 2014 http://epi.org.mk/docs/Preporaka%20vo%20senka_Analiza%20na%20izvestajot%20na%20EK%20za%20napredokot%20na%20RM%20za%202014.pdf

Same recommendation, New recommendation, the Report of the European Commission on the progress of the Republic of Macedonia in 2012 under scrutiny

http://epi.org.mk/docs/analiza_-_zakluchoci_-_ocenki_po_kriteriumi_i_poglavja_pr_2012_mk_commentary_%D0%9C%D0%9A.pdf

term **backsliding, which is determined in key areas such as: judicial system, freedom of expression and management of public finances (fiscal discipline)** more freely and more often.⁴

Referencing the contents of the intercepted communications

In this Report, the Commission on many occasions directly references the contents from the intercepted communications which show the existence of systemic problems with the rule of law, as well as the involvement of high government officials (see segment key assessments: political criteria). The Commission is referencing the contents from the communications with regard to the election irregularities, (in)dependence of the judiciary, politization of the public administration, media influence in the fight against corruption and organized crime.

The Commission is referencing the contents of the published communication from 'the bombs'

Key assessments

In this part of the analysis we demonstrate the key assessments. **The overview of the recommendations is provided in the appendix 2.**

Political criteria: back to fundamentals

In line with the altered methodology, the political criteria are amended in their structure and contents which were previously moved to the chapters 23 and 24 are returned (now they are repetitive). In essence, there are no big differences. Methodologically, in the previous years a descriptive assessment of the progress made by the country was used, but this year the EC returned the standardized terms (little progress, moderate progress, progress, etc.) for certain areas, particularly in governance, civil society, judiciary, fight against corruption and organized crime. It is not by chance that they are closely correlated to the Urgent reform priorities.

The altered structure of the political criteria is provided in the Appendix 1.

The report goes deeply into the scanning of political events in the Republic of Macedonia, especially in relation to the political dialogue between the four biggest political parties and the Urgent Reform priorities (URP). The content of the published intercepted materials is used as a source of information for determining a certain situation. The findings of the Pribe Report are fully valued and integrated in this Report.

The EC stipulates that until the closing of the report, not all elements of the political agreement are implemented and that a the majority of the deadlines have not been respected. The assessment is that **the realization of the urgent reform priorities has**

⁴ In comparison, in the EU accession countries the backsliding is mentioned in: the Report on Turkey (public procurement, Freedom of expression and Freedom of Assembly), Bosnia in 2 areas (Freedom of expression and information society and media), and Albania – in the area of public procurement. No backsliding is stipulated in the Reports on Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo.

started slowly and that there are no satisfactory results until the closing of the report.

2.1. Democracy

Last years assessment of a divisive political culture, lack of compromise and breakdown in dialogue is repeated, but it is stipulated that this is now in the form of a continuing and protracted political crisis – assessed as the most difficult since 2001. ““

The crisis deepened further with the publication of intercepted conversations including senior government and governing party officials suggesting breaches of fundamental rights, interference with judicial independence, media freedom and elections, and politicisation and corruption in various fields.”

The EC stresses that it signaled concern for all these issues in the previous Progress Reports.

- It is stipulated that the content of the intercepted communications reflected the shortcomings regarding **elections**, previously signalled by OSCE/ODIHR, and other suspicions.
- The EC deliniates that the ongoing crisis has underlined the need for **parliament** to substantially improve its performance as a forum for constructive political dialogue and representation, as well as its legislative and oversight functions. A reference is made to the needs to include credible functional oversight of the work of the intelligence services and the capacity to monitor the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country. The absence of the main opposition party for most of the reporting period **diminished the quality of reforms and hindered the operation of checks and balances.**

In the segment that was previously called „government“, and now is called „governance“ the call for political responsibility is dominant. According to the EC, the “governance in the country was strained by the ongoing political crisis and called into question by revelations of unethical behaviour, illegal activities and even potential criminal offences.” The current resignations of two ministers and the head of the intelligence service – are obviously considered insufficient – it is therefore determined that “only limited political responsibility” was taken.

- The EC recommends the establishment of oversight over the key bodies(all independent regulatory, supervisory and advisory bodies which should be able to carry out their functions proactively, effectively and free from political pressure).
- The Interethnic tensions underline the need to fully implement the Ohrid Framework Agreement. The EC proposed that it views the interethnic relations as fragile which were complicated by the events in Kumanovo and Gošince. Although the public, to a great extent, does not see an interethnic character in these last happenings and also there were calls on the part of most political leaders not the view the same as an interethnic incident, it still remains for them to be investigated thoroughly, in a transparent manner which shall contribute towards the strenghtening of the interethnic trust.
- Although the interethnic nature of the structure of political parties included in the key political processes and agreements is in the direction of maintaining the interethnic

relations, there is still mistrust and tensions that exist, for whose surmounting additional measures are necessary.

- This year, the EC established some progress in the development of the **civil sector** and expresses serious concern for the difficult climate in which they operate. During the political crisis, the constructive role played by CSOs is commended by organising numerous peaceful protests across ethnic lines and cross-ethnic unity in the aftermath of the tragic Kumanovo events of spring 2015. , and demanding greater accountability of politicians. The EC considers that there are political polarization and divisions among the civil society organizations which support the Government and those that are critical towards it.
- **The oversight of the intelligence services is assessed as not functioning.** Sufficient responsibility has not been taken for the serious failings within the intelligence service to prevent the illegal interception. The recommendations from the 'Urgent Reform Priorities' must be implemented.

2.2. Public Administration Reform

The EC assesses that the Republic of Macedonia is **moderately prepared** with regard to the public administration reform. **Some progress** was made on the legislation and improvement in service delivery to citizens and businesses. This part also refers to the content of the leaked wiretapped materials and refers to the delay in fully implementing the new legal framework. There is a repetition of the statement that strong political will is necessary to guarantee the independence of administration and respect for the principles of transparency, merit and equitable representation.

2.3. Rule of law

The judiciary is one of the most critical areas, in which there is a clear stipulation of „**backsliding**“. It is stressed that In the large majority of 'ordinary' cases, courts are able to act independently, however there is political interference in certain high-profile or politically sensitive court cases, which, casts a shadow over an otherwise functioning judicial system“. **The political interference brings into question the reforms which have already been carried out.** The existence of „selective justice“ is related to the doubts in the functioning of the electronic case management system. In view of the budget, the total amount of finances per capita is lower than the European average, while the number of judges per capita is higher.

The political interference in view of politically sensitive i.e. high-profile court cases, "casts a shadow over an otherwise functioning judicial system" and clearly stipulates „backsliding“.

The country is at *some level of preparation*, but *no progress* has been achieved *in the fight against corruption* which remains widespread. This kind of situation is related to the lack of political will and political interference which is hampering the ability of the relevant bodies to act proactively and non-selectively. The content of the intercepted communications has raised serious allegations against high government officials for abuses of power and corruption. The reluctance of the relevant law enforcement bodies, including the Public Prosecutor's Office, to follow up on these revelations is of concern, thus bringing in question their independence.

The "selective passivity" i.e. the reluctance of the relevant law enforcement bodies, including the Public Prosecutor's Office, to follow up on these revelations of the wiretapped materials is of concern, thus bringing in question their independence.

There is also *no progress* in *the fight against organized crime*, although here there is a moderate *level of alignment*. The fights against organized crime is part of the Chapter 24, but in this report it is again moved to the political

criteria as well. According to the EC the content of the intercepted communications has brought to light serious shortcomings in the practical application of the Law on Interception of Communication. The lack of an independent, external and transparent oversight over the police leaves space for constant allegations for politization.

This report also singles out *the fight against terrorism* due to the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters and radicalisation, as a result of which the need for a comprehensive and effective strategy is stressed.

2.4. Human rights and the protection of minorities

- The EC notes *backsliding* in *the freedom of expression*. The EC refers to the intercepted communication in three different cases in order to stress the control of the authorities in power over the media. The journalists are subject to pressure, harassment and self-censorship. Despite the legal framework, concern is expressed over the political independence of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services as well as the role of the MTV as a public broadcaster. References are made to political interference in the editorial policies as well as tight relations among the government and the owners of the largest television outlets which are receiving the biggest share of finances from government campaigns. The EC points out SITEL, Kanal 5, Alfa, MTV as progovernment oriented with a selective approach in their reporting. The general conclusion is that the freedom of expression is becoming a serious challenge.
- *The LGBT community* continues to suffer from discrimination and homophobic media content. The fact which is worrying is that there has not been a full investigation and no perpetrators have been found in any of the assaults.
- The situation of the *Roma community* remains critical. Regardless of the adopted Strategy, there is almost no progress in the sense of political representation, media coverage of the Roma language and the status of the Roma

language in the municipalities where Roma constitute the majority of the community.

- **The Ohrid Framework Agreement** continues to ensure a basis for interethnic relations. More forms of discrimination against minorities still exist while the activities for fight against stereotypes, including the media, remain ineffective. The EC notes the weak interinstitutional cooperation and criticizes the fact that the systemic measures are to a great extent financed by donors while the measures against segregation in the schools are insufficient.

2.5. Regional issues and international obligations

The know statement that Macedonia participates actively in regional initiatives and continued to play a generally constructive role in the bilateral relations with other countries

The name issue goes completely in the background – it receives the least attention in this Report compared to all the previous ones.

seeking to join the EU and with neighbouring EU Member States. Fresh impetus has been given to regional cooperation by the Berlin Process, with the Western Balkan Six (WB6) intensifying cooperation among themselves and with the EU.

It is characteristic that this year **the name issue receives the least attention in comparison to the past years.** The other contents from the political criteria receive far more attention.

Relations with Bulgaria continued to be affected by open issues primarily differences about ‘the interpretation of history,’ but they do not obstruct cooperation in other areas as well as daily people-to-people contacts.

With regard to the name issue with Greece, it remains essential that decisive steps are taken towards resolving this issue.⁵ Although there is a lack of formal talks, the Greek Foreign Minister visited the country for the first time in 11 years and the two sides agreed a number of confidence building measures.

Overview of the key assessments, comparative to the 2011-2015 period is provided in Appendix 3.

⁵EU enlargement strategy 2015, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions, 10 November 2014, COM (2015) 611 final, pg. 14

Economic criteria

The preparedness of Macedonia for the developing of a functioning market economy is assessed as good, although this year (unlike the previous ones) **no progress was made**. Furthermore, the Commission assesses that the Macedonian economy is *“partially prepared to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union.”*

The EC statement that there is no progress made in the economic criteria is directly convergent to the government attitudes for success in the economic field.

A concern is raised about the increase in public debt as it was mentioned last year. **This year, the Commission stated backsliding in the fiscal discipline and management of public finances, particularly in view of transparency.** Almost half of the public spending was intended for *“social transfers including pensions, which the government had increased, as in the previous year, beyond what was required by law and despite falling prices.”* Public sector wages and agricultural subsidies were also raised ‘beyond statutory requirements’. It is due to these reasons that there is a need of midterm planning of expenditure.

The assessments of the macroeconomic situation and the monetary policy are positive, but the need for further development of the private sector is stressed, which to a great extent is unabled due to the gray economy.

Labour market conditions remained burdened by structural impediments. The high unemployment rate, the low participation of women in the labour market, the inadequate active measures and the creation of new jobs in mainly low productivity sectors, limit progress. Nevertheless, some progress was notified particularly as regards addressing prevalent shortcomings in human capital and physical infrastructure.

The main criticism of the Commission is the “backsliding” in the management of public finances

The frequent legislative changes, the unequal application of laws and the hindered implementation of the agreements continues to burden business activities.

The Commission marks positive developments as regards the business environment and a continuous effort to promote growth and employment through major public infrastructure investment and foreign direct investment (FDI). **However, the status of a functioning market economy is still not granted to Macedonia.** This year the Commission explains it with the backsliding of fiscal discipline, the weak contract enforcement and the large informal economy.

This year’s methodological novelty relates to the explicit connectedness of this part of the report to the Economic Reform Programme (EPR) and the outlining of

This year, the Commission stated backsliding in the fiscal discipline and management of public finances, particularly in view of transparency.

recommendations provided in the same. The EPR, as a standardized document for the countries in the enlargement process, determines a mid term macro-fiscal policy with key structural reforms directed towards the support of the same as well as increasing of competitiveness. The Commission prepared the recommendations on the basis of EPR and it proposes that the Government undertakes additional measures for their realization.

Ability to take on the obligations of membership

In view of the ability to take on the obligations from membership the country has a relative **good level of preparation for taking on the obligations from membership**. Still, according to our assessment, this is still at 2,91 from the possible 5. The level of alignment/preparedness is lower than before, compared to the previous years.

The EC kept the continuously repeated statement that greater attention needs to be placed on the administrative capacity itself and on the effective implementation.

In most of the areas, in accordance to the new assessment which is provided by the Commission, the country is moderately prepared. **It is explicitly stressed that further efforts are needed in those chapters in which the country is in the early stage of preparation.** As such, only two chapters were listed i.e. **Freedom of movement for workers and Financial and budgetary provisions**. This attitude is inconsistent due to the fact that these chapters in practice are aligned in the later stage of accession. **What is characteristic is that there is no chapter which is assessed as being well advanced.**

Assessment of the level of alignment for 2015 by chapters

Assessment	
Early stage of preparation ⁶ – 1	Freedom of movement for workers; Financial and budgetary provisions
Some level of preparation ⁷ – 2	Food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy; Judiciary and fundamental rights
Moderately prepared ⁸ – 3	Free movement of capital; Right of establishment and freedom to provide services; Free movement of capital; Public procurement; Intellectual property law; Competition policy; Financial services; Agriculture and rural development; Fisheries ; Transport policy; Energy; Taxation; Economic and monetary policy; Statistics; Social policy and employment; Enterprise and industrial policy; Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments; Justice, freedom and security ; Education and culture; Environment and climate change; Consumer and health protection; External relations; Foreign, security and defence policy; Financial control
Good level of preparation ⁹ – 4	Company Law; Information society and media; Trans-European networks; Science and research; Customs union;
Well advanced ¹⁰ – 5	

⁶Early stage of preparation

⁷Some level of preparation

⁸Moderately prepared

⁹Good level of preparation

¹⁰Well advanced

In view of the progress made in the past 12-months period, *Judiciary and fundamental rights* and *Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments*.

In accordance to our analysis, the highest backsliding, as compared to the previous years as well as in view of the level of alignment with the acquis itself and the progress made by the country in the past 12-months period, could be noted in two chapters i.e. Judiciary and Fundamental rights and Justice, freedom and security .

The continuous downfall of the progress and the level of preparedness in Chapter 31- Foreign, security and defence policy is also indicative due to the fact that it clearly states that the Republic of Macedonia aligns its foreign policy positions less and less with those of the EU.

While the previous report contains enumeration of the chapters in which there is progress and the chapters in which further progress is needed, in this Report progress is confirmed in the chapters which are unclued under the fundamentals and they shall be explicitly monitored with the new approach.

Comparison to 2014 in view of the progress and alignment

In comparison to the 2014 Progress Report, there are differences in this Report in view of the assessments for the progress made and the alignment.

With regard to the **progress made**, as compared to 2014, there are **higher assessments** in the chapters: Right of establishment and freedom to provide services, Free movement of capital, Economic and monetary policy, Social policy and employment, Trans-European networks, Customs Union, External relations, Foreign, security and defence policy and Financial and budgetary provisions.

Lower assessments with regard to the progress made as compared to the 2014 Progress Report are the chapters: Public Procurement, Company Law, Competition policy, Information society and media, Food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy, Statistics, Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments and Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments, Justice, freedom and security.

The ability to take on obligations from membership/The alignment with the acquis of the EU is assessed on a higher level in comparison to the 2014 **Progress Report in the chapters:** Information society and media, Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments and Science and Research

Lower level is assessed with regard to the chapters: Free movement of capital, Public Procurement, Food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy, Fisheries, Economic and Monetary policy, Statistics and Justice, freedom and security.

Appendix 1: Structure of the Political criteria in the 2015 Progress report

2. Political criteria

2.1. Democracy

Elections

Parliament

Governance

Civil society

Oversight over the intelligence services(Chapter 24 – Justice, freedom and security)

2.2. Public Administration Reform

2.3. Rule of law

Functioning of the judiciary (Chapter 23 – Judiciary and fundamental rights)

Fight against corruption (Chapter 23 – Judiciary and fundamental rights)

Fight against organized crime (Chapter 24 – Justice, freedom and security)

Fight against terrorism (Chapter 24 – Justice, freedom and security)

2.4. Human rights and the protection of the non-majority communities

Freedom of expression

2.5. Regional issues and international obligations

Appendix 2: Overview of recommendations from the 2015 - 2016 political criteria

2.1. Democracy

Elections

- Full implementation of the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations before holding of next elections.

Parliament

- Implementation of the recommendations from the Inquiry Committee for the events related to 24 December 2012.

Governance

- all independent regulatory, supervisory and advisory bodies need to be able to carry out their functions proactively, effectively and free from political pressure and without exercising inappropriate political self-restraint or interpreting their own mandate in an excessively formal way. These bodies include the State Election Commission, the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Judicial and Prosecution Councils and the State Audit Office.

Oversight of the intelligence services,

- All the recommendations from the Urgent Reform Priorities on oversight and reforms.

2.2. Public administration reform

- address serious concerns about the politicisation of public service; ensure full implementation of the principles of transparency, merit and equitable representation, including introduction of an improved human resources management information system)
- suspend and review the implementation of the Law on Transformation of Temporary Positions into Permanent Contracts until the principle of merit is fully observed
- adopt a public administration reform strategy and a public financial management reform programme, which will address the weaknesses identified, including budget transparency.

2.3. Rule of Law

Judiciary

- depoliticisation the appointment and promotion systems in practice, not only in law;
- providing full support and resources to the Special Prosecutor;
- reforming of the existing discipline and dismissal system for judges;
- adopting of a new Judicial Reform Strategy and action plan addressing remaining shortcomings in a sustainable manner;
- improving the strategic planning, needs assessment, resource management and allocation within the judiciary.

Fight against corruption

- *demonstrating real political will in the fight against corruption in the form of autonomous and effective measures by law enforcement and supervisory bodies, notably the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption;*
- *increasing the visibility of anti-corruption measures and the results achieved to improve public awareness and trust;*
- *developing a credible track record on fighting high level corruption;*
- *creating an effective framework for the protection of whistle-blowers, in line with European standards and best practices.*

Fight against organised crime

- *establishing a sound track record on combating money laundering, and improving capacity and expertise to carry out financial investigations and asset confiscations on a more systematic basis;;*
- *stepping up efforts to improve cooperation between the various law enforcement agencies by bringing the National Coordination Centre for the Fight against Organised Crime into full operation;*
- *revising the legal and technical framework for intercepting communications, and increasing the effectiveness of special investigative measures for genuine law enforcement purposes (Urgent Reform Priorities).*

2.4. Human rights

Freedom of expression

- *ensuring full transparency on government advertising and develop a mechanism for unpaid public service announcements of a true public interest character.*
- *enforcing, at political level, the exercising of appropriate self-restraint by politicians and public officials not to resort to defamation actions, in line with ECtHR case law*
- *ensuring that the public has access to objective and accurate reporting and a variety of viewpoints through the mainstream media, particularly the public service broadcaster.*