



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 19 July 2023
(OR. en)

11844/23
ADD 1

RELEX 894

NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Debrief on the joint visit of the Foreign Ministers of Czechia, Slovakia and Austria on behalf of the HRVP to North Macedonia on 13 July - Request by the Czech, Slovak and Austrian Delegations for an AOB item

Delegations will find attached a letter from the Czech, Slovak and Austrian Delegations concerning the joint visit of their Foreign Ministers to North Macedonia on 13 July. The topic will be included as an “Any other business” item on the agenda for the Foreign Affairs Council on 20 July 2023.

**AOB item requested by the Czech, Slovak and Austrian Delegations for the FAC
(20 July 2023)**

 Federal Ministry
Republic of Austria
European and International
Affairs



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of the Czech Republic

 **MINISTRY**
OF FOREIGN
AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Vienna/Prague/Bratislava, 18/07/2023

H.E. Josep Borrell Fontelles
High Representative
Vice President of the Commission

Dear High Representative,

Upon your request, as mandated in your letter of 5 July, we paid a joint visit to North Macedonia on 13 July 2023.

We met with President Stevo Pendarovski, Foreign Minister Bujar Osmani, Deputy Prime Minister Fatmir Bytyqi, Defense Minister Slavjanka Petrovska, President of the Parliament Talat Xhaferi, the leader of the main opposition party Hristijan Mickoski together with over 40 parliamentarians of his party and its allies, with representatives of the governing coalition in parliament and the leader of the Democratic Union for Integration party, Ali Ahmeti.

This visit was timely and in view of the ongoing discussion on passing the constitutional amendments necessary. Our messages followed previous diplomatic outreach and clearly served to underline the necessity for North Macedonia to proceed on its path towards the EU, particularly in the current geopolitical context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. We stressed that we valued North Macedonia's role as being a key ally and trusted partner, fully aligned with the EU's CFSP and currently serving as CiO of the OSCE.

We stressed that as Foreign Ministers of the Slavkov Group travelling on your behalf we came as friends and allies in order to foster and support the EU integration of the country, which is a strategic choice of its citizens. We urged that all political leaders and groups should contribute to taking the country forward towards the EU and should work on establishing internal political consensus towards this goal and more generally EU affairs, also with a view to enlargement negotiations and approximation to the EU acquis later on.

In our meetings, we focussed on the need to pass the constitutional amendments to include in the constitution citizens who live within the borders of the state and who are part of other peoples, such as Bulgarians. This being a precondition to proceed towards EU enlargement, we encouraged passing them as soon as possible so that the next Intergovernmental Conference can take place without delay, hopefully reflecting positive results of the ongoing screening and concrete steps on North Macedonia's accession path. We expressed our clear concern about a possible stalemate being an invitation to further harmful third-party influence aimed at undermining the EU perspective of an already volatile region.

Positively, all our interlocutors reiterated their commitment to the European integration of North Macedonia. They wish to proceed on their path to the EU, albeit with different views as to how exactly this is to happen.

The government and the representatives of the ruling coalition in parliament were well aware of the necessity to pass the constitutional amendments. In our talks, they indicated that the government could introduce them in parliament this week.

The opposition, whose support is – at least partly – necessary for the passage of the constitutional amendments, remains firmly opposed without putting forward concrete and feasible alternatives. Some of our interlocutors recalled the long and often delayed process of North Macedonia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration, and perceived lack of trust that no further bilateral issues will be raised in the course of the enlargement process. Confronted with questions of identity, we expressed our conviction that the Macedonian language, culture and history can contribute to and strengthen a Europe united in diversity. In reaction to the opposition's view that once in power, they can re-evaluate the situation, we stressed that any changes to the EU consensus reached last year are highly unrealistic. Additionally, we reflected on our own shared past giving rise to sensitive questions of identity, culture and history and that in our experience the best remedy was European integration.

In our assessment, this joint visit has served well as a strong sign of encouragement and support regarding the necessary steps to be taken as described above. It equally sent the necessary message of urgency warning against the potential stalemate in the country's enlargement process should the constitutional amendments fail to materialize.

In our outreach to the public in addition to the messages above, we stressed in particular the benefits relating to security, prosperity and economic stability to be gained by proceeding towards the EU. We urged those responsible across the political spectrum to seize this geopolitical moment. Both press conferences were well covered and received.

With the aim of keeping North Macedonia engaged in the EU enlargement process, it is therefore crucial that all EU institutions and Member States remain engaged with North Macedonia at all levels. We also should not underestimate the level of frustration and fatigue of ordinary citizens of North Macedonia caused by their country's complicated journey towards the EU. We must not lose their trust.

We stand ready to provide additional information during the forthcoming Foreign Affairs Council on 20 July.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for having entrusted us with this joint mission, and we furthermore thank the EU Delegation in Skopje and the EEAS for the very valuable support provided during our visit.

Yours faithfully,



Alexander Schallenberg
Federal Minister for European and
International Affairs,
Austria



Jan Lipavský
Minister of Foreign
Affairs,
Czechia



Miroslav Wlachovský
Minister of Foreign
and European Affairs,
Slovakia