
Commentary following the European Commission Report on the Republic of North Macedonia from 4 November 2025



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RISK OF FALLING BEHIND

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INTRODUCTION

The 2025 Enlargement Package is the first one prepared by the Commissioner Marta Kos as part of the second term in office of Ursula von der Leyen. This year, the Commission, in the very first sentence of the Enlargement Strategy as a framework document for the entire package, emphasises that **geopolitical challenges have strengthened the unity of the EU**, as well as that each enlargement has made the Union stronger. The European Commission's 2025 Enlargement Strategy confirms the transformation of the enlargement from a technical process into a geopolitical strategy. In a situation of security instability and new channels of influence, the Commission sends a clear message that the integration of the Western Balkans is a matter of European security, not a bureaucratic exercise.

The Strategy emphasises the gradual integration into the EU common market, emphasising that it is a tool to support enlargement, not its replacement. In this context, the Strategy underlines that the alignment of the legislation and the capacity to implement the relevant EU acquis is a fundamental condition to use this tool. It underlines that the agreements to access the internal market will include a robust institutional framework and legal safeguards, as well as dispute settlement mechanisms, in accordance with the EU treaties, to ensure the integrity of the internal market and the consistent implementation of the EU acquis. The Strategy presents the current initiatives on roaming, SEPA, and mentions already known opportunities for integration in agriculture, trusted services, space, healthcare, transport and defence as well as new initiatives.

The **Growth Plan for the Western Balkans** is presented as an initiative that supports and prepares the enlargement countries for membership. The Strategy indicates that the Reform and Growth Instrument helps to implement the EU acquis for gradual integration into sections of the single market and facilitate the transition to membership. North Macedonia, along with Montenegro and Albania, are the only countries in the region for which the Commission has adopted decisions to release pre-financing and reform funds, which were to be finalised by December 2024 and June 2025, respectively.

A significant novelty are the **target deadlines/dates for the closure of negotiations, which the Commission** mentions in the Strategy, noting that for the first time since 2014, enlargement is a real possibility. The Commission states that Montenegro and Albania plan to close negotiations by the end of 2026 and 2027 respectively. Serbia, Moldova and Ukraine have also declared dates for the closure of accession negotiations. This separation confirms that the "regional package" logic in the enlargement process has not been applied for some time now. Additionally, in the context of the upcoming enlargement, the Commission announces that it is considering introducing safeguards to prevent regression in the area of the rule of law in the new member states in the **future accession treaties**, but also to win over the Member States.

Although announced several times, the Commission has not yet prepared the document for policy analyses and the necessary reforms in anticipation of the enlargement, which is once again said to be in the process of being prepared.

Just like every year, the Strategy conveys key messages regarding the course of the accession process and negotiations. In the key section of the Strategy, the Conclusions and Recommendations, with regard to North Macedonia, it is noted that the institutions have continued to work on the roadmaps for the rule of law, public administration reform and the functioning of democratic institutions, as well as the action plan for the protection of national minorities. In addition to the decisive and prompt steps required for the opening benchmarks, the Commission emphasises that no steps have been taken to adopt the constitutional amendments. From the formal dimension aspect for accession, the Commission informs that the screening reports for all six clusters have been presented to the Council, and it further emphasises that the country needs to implement essential EU-related reforms.

Under such circumstances of formal stagnation, which in the Macedonian case has become common practice, the 2025 report once again indicates that without an active negotiation process, reforms are moving slowly. This year, the shifts are largely due to the commitments from the Reform Agenda, as part of the Growth Plan.

Regarding the country report, even though the European Commission does not find any setbacks in any area, i.e. chapter, the fact that there is no progress in Chapter 23: Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and limited progress in Chapter 24: Justice, Freedom and Security, the key chapters on the rule of law, decisive for the pace of negotiations, is a cause for concern.

In terms of meeting the obligations of membership, the country still maintains a moderate level of preparation, with a slight improvement forward in only one chapter, the Free Movement of Capital, as a result of meeting the obligations of membership in the EU's Single Euro Payments Area. In comparison to all the other candidates at the moment, our overall alignment is not negligible, but the advancing of Montenegro and the accelerated alignment of Albania as "frontrunners" is quite clear¹.

Progress is good in four chapters,² while in the rest, to a significant level, there is only a small shift or stagnation. In that regard, we look worse than the other candidates, which are assessed to have progressed more in the past year, especially Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine and Moldova, which the Commission singles out as leading candidate countries. If this trend continues, there is a risk of not being able to keep up with the other countries in terms of the relatively high level of harmonisation, which in the Macedonian case was achieved much earlier than in the other candidate countries.

In this document, we analyse the trends at a cluster/chapter level in the 2025 report, focusing on critical points, as well as the new recommendations by the Commission. At the end of the commentary, an analysis of the harmonisation in the course of the previous years is included.³

1 See a comparative overview of the preparation of the Western Balkan countries and of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, at the following link <https://epi.org.mk/post/32330>

2 Chapter 4: Free movement of capital; Chapter 25: Science and research; Chapter 29: Customs union; and Chapter 31: Foreign, security and defence policy.

3 EPI's analyses of EC's reports since 2011 available at the following link: <https://bit.ly/4nFMPC2>

KEY FINDINGS BY CLUSTER

Cluster 1. Fundamentals

Functioning of democratic institutions

In this area, where elections, Parliament, functioning of the Government, as well as civil society are monitored, the European Commission concludes that the functioning of democratic institutions is generally stable.

In the case of **elections**, it is concluded that the Electoral Code, amended in March 2024, provides a framework for holding democratic elections, but when it comes to the remaining recommendations from the OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission they have still not been implemented. This year, in fact, the amending of the Electoral Code has been part of the reform agenda as a reform step that the country has not taken.

The Parliament, as in the past few years, is assessed to be working effectively and consistently using the EU flag in the procedure. However, as in many of the reports in recent years, political polarisation has been identified, which results in postponing of important reform measures and appointments to certain offices. The Parliament should accelerate the necessary reforms in the area of European integration, as well as plan and carefully adopt the agendas and limit the use of shortened procedures for the adoption of laws.

Regarding the **Government**, despite some progress, a comprehensive reform of local self-government is still urgently needed, and the dialogue between the different levels of government needs to be strengthened. Inter-ethnic relations remain stable, and the Framework Agreement continues to be implemented.

It is necessary to continue strengthening the **European integration structures**, to achieve effective coordination between line ministries and institutions, and to strengthen the expertise of the public administration related to the *acquis communautaire*.

As regards the **civil society**, the EC highlights as encouraging progress the reactivation of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society. In this regard, the Council should effectively perform its role. The Government should increase its efforts to ensure the involvement of civil society in all priority areas and consultative activities. The amendments to the legal and financial frameworks to ensure transparent funding of civil society organisations have not yet been adopted.

Public Administration Reform

This year, just like in 2023 and 2024, the European Commission assesses that the country is moderately prepared, but unlike in 2023 and 2024, when limited progress was noted (due to the Law on the Organisation of the State Administration and the new PAR Strategy), this report notes **some progress** due to the e-Government, specifically the amendments to the Law on Electronic Documents, Electronic Identification and Trust Services. Furthermore, in July 2025, the long-awaited laws on administrative servants and public sector employees were adopted. The EC recommendations from last year have been partially implemented and remain valid in terms of the implementation of the aforementioned laws that were adopted. As in the past few years, the Commission emphasises that there is fragmentation in the civil service and warns that there are no policies for retaining employees. Although positive developments have been achieved in terms of the regulatory impact assessment, the policy development and coordination cycle, without adequate preparation and participation, and also due to the lack of evaluation, still remains a challenge.

23. Judiciary and Fundamental Rights

Unlike last year, when there was limited progress in Chapter 23, there is **no progress** in this area this year, just like in 2023. This is generally due to the pressures on the judiciary, as well as the tragedy in Kochani, on 16 March this year. On the other hand, the level of alignment remains unchanged since 2019 i.e. this report once again notes that North Macedonia is between **some** and a **moderate level** of preparation.

Judiciary

It is noted that the implementation of the Strategy for Judicial Reform (2024-2028) started, but the level of implementation has been low so far due to the late activation of the Council for monitoring its implementation. At the same time, it is noted that there are interference and pressure from other branches of government, in particular on members of the Judicial Council to resign. A recurring observation from previous years is the insufficient financial and human resources, and consequently since 2020 lack of progress in the implementation of the human resources management strategies in the courts and public prosecutors' offices.

With regard to the Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors, the general conclusion is that they need to step up their efforts to protect the independence, integrity and professionalism of judges and prosecutors.

Both the Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors have made efforts to improve the transparency of their work, but the European Commission calls for detailed explanations for their decisions, especially regarding the election, appointment and promotion of judges and prosecutors, as in the previous annual report.

The independence and impartiality of the judiciary need to be improved, while the perceived level of trust in the judiciary remains very low. The interference in the judiciary by senior officials and representatives of other branches of government is of a serious concern, and in particular the interpellation against members of the Judicial Council which is being considered at the Parliament, as well as repeated statements

by senior politicians that, according to the Commission, constitute excessive influence or intimidation, and undermine the independence of the judiciary. With regard to the procedure for the election of the President of the Supreme Court, it is considered to raise concerns about possible influence, while there are also instances of deviations from the ranking lists in the election of judges.

The shortage of judicial and prosecutorial staff is again highlighted as a serious systemic challenge, present for several years in a row, further aggravated by the delay in the start of the training of the ninth generation of students at the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors, because no funds were allocated in the state budget for 2025. These constraints, along with the increased backlog of cases and prolonged court proceedings, contribute to a further decline in the quality and efficiency of justice. In addition, it is stated that outdated ICT systems, including the Automated Court Case Management Information System – ACCMIS, which is not compatible and the IT case management system at the Public Prosecutor's Office, which is still pending, hinder the digitalisation, transparency and modernisation of the justice system.

Fight against corruption

Just like last year, North Macedonia shows **some to moderate level of preparation** in the fight against corruption and there is **no progress** in preventing and fighting corruption. Corruption remains widespread and causes serious concern, and the tragedy of 16 March 2025, in Kochani, which revealed systemic challenges in the implementation of anti-corruption measures, was specifically mentioned. In the section on the institutional framework, the indictment filed against the President of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC), was noted as an event that called into question the credibility of the institution. Out of a total of 14 investigative centres attached to public prosecutor's office, 5 are fully operational, but they still lack human and financial resources. The consequences of the amendments to the Criminal Code of 2023 are once again noted, because they have caused delays in some court cases and become statute-barred or end with minimal sentences, which strengthens public scepticism regarding the effectiveness of the fight against corruption. Last year's recommendations have not been fully implemented and remain to be implemented, and the need to adopt a new Criminal Code is particularly emphasised.

Fundamental rights

The fundamental rights assessment remains **partially aligned with the EU standards**, with serious problems in the systematic implementation of the legal framework. The recommendations from last year have been partially implemented and remain unchanged. The need for financial support for the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination and the Ombudsman is again highlighted, as well as the need to improve the conditions in the prisons. The need to adopt amendments to the Law on the Ombudsman, amendments that are necessary to obtain the "A" status accreditation, based on the Paris Principles, continues to be highlighted. In addition, the need to elect a new Ombudsman whose term in office expired in July 2025 as well as of his deputies is also highlighted.

The 2025 report, as in many previous years, is critical in regard to the deterioration and poor detention conditions in prisons, police stations and psychiatric facilities, **where North Macedonia is currently among the countries for which there is the highest concern**. The recommendations of the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture have not been implemented.

In 2025, there has been no progress in the area of personal data protection, as the Government removed the Personal Data Protection Agency from the list of bodies that are mandatorily consulted when adopting laws, and the Parliament has not yet appointed a director, which seriously weakens its independence and ability to implement the Personal Data Protection Strategy 2025-2030.

Limited progress is noted in regard to the freedom of expression, with the same recommendations just like last year. Attacks on journalists continue, with a particularly high number of attacks on female journalists. In 2025, the financial independence of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services improved, with increased budget funds, however the non-transparent distribution of advertising in commercial media and suspicions of non-transparent selection of new members of the Agency's Council raise concerns about political influence and the breach of media independence.

Regarding women's rights, the weak implementation of the Istanbul Convention and the National Strategy for Gender Equality is once again emphasised. Gender-based violence and hate speech are on the rise, and institutions still lack effective mechanisms for protecting and supporting victims.

In the area of children's rights, the need to establish a national coordinating body for the implementation of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child is emphasised. The need for the National Action Plan for Children's Rights 2025-2029, which was adopted in August 2025, is underlined.

In terms of the rights of persons with disabilities, the Law on the Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications of Public Sector Institutions has been adopted, but infrastructural and social barriers still remain. Legal protection of LGBTIQ persons remains insufficient, and discrimination and hate speech are still widespread, especially on social media. The need to adopt a national strategy for equality of LGBTIQ persons is emphasised, and the 2019 ECtHR judgement on legal gender recognition has not been implemented. Additionally, amendments to the laws on primary and secondary education were adopted in an expedited procedure and without consultation with relevant stakeholders, removing content related to sexual and reproductive health and gender equality, which raised concerns about compliance with the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination and international standards.

As regards the rights of the Roma, there has been satisfactory progress in implementing the Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma 2022-2030, with the appointment of a national coordinator, however, the strategy lacks a clear approach to participation, empowerment and capacity building and interinstitutional cooperation remains at a low level. This report, as the previous ones, emphasises the need to implement the Strategy "One Society for All".

24. Justice, freedom and security

As regards Chapter 24: Justice, freedom and security, North Macedonia remains **moderately prepared** for the implementation of the EU acquis, just like in last year's report. There is a change in the level of progress, which was assessed better last year, and this year the country is considered to have made **limited progress** in this area. Last year's assessment was due to the progress achieved in the area of confiscation with the alignment of domestic legislation with EU acquis, as well as the implementation of the new agreement with Frontex. This year, however, it is noted that North Macedonia needs to strengthen its capacities to fight all forms of serious and organised crime, and in the area of migration and asylum there is no further alignment with the EU acquis. Last year's recommendations were partially implemented and remain valid.

The country is assessed along the line between moderate and some level of preparation to **fight organised crime**, with limited progress, unlike last year when we had some progress. In terms of the institutional framework, the National Coordination Centre for the Fight against Organised Crime is operational but lacks resources, as do the investigation centres, which are integrated into several public prosecutor's offices. For the National Security Agency, it is reiterated that in order to ensure full independence, it should not stay in the premises of the Ministry of Interior, while the OTA (Operational-Technical Agency) should not remain in the same building with the national telecommunications operator. Adequate financial and human resources must be provided to ensure OTA's proper functioning. An increased number of investigations and final convictions in the field of organised crime has been noted, as well as progress in freezing and confiscation of assets. A good level of operational cooperation with EUROPOL is established.

In addressing **trafficking in human beings**, the legal framework is considered to be only partially aligned with the EU acquis. It needs to be amended to comply with the Directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims and with the revised Directive, which entered into force in July 2024.

In the area of **drugs**, the recommendation that the cooperation should be improved is reiterated. In regard to the **fight against terrorism**, North Macedonia has a satisfactory level of implementation, but the legal framework for the protection of critical infrastructure and the resilience of critical entities is not aligned with the EU acquis, so the protection of critical infrastructure and the resilience of critical entities need to be improved.

As regards **judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters**, progress is limited and it is recommended to improve cooperation in civil and criminal matters. The legal framework for the management of legal and irregular **migration** is partially aligned with the EU acquis, hence migration management needs to be improved.

In the area of **asylum**, partial alignment with the EU acquis is once again noted. Improvements in the quality of asylum procedures and additional staff are needed to efficiently handle cases. Further efforts are also needed to address the delayed family reunification of persons under subsidiary protection, in particular unaccompanied minors.

In regard to the **visa policy**, North Macedonia is largely aligned with the EU regime and shows good progress. In the area of **Schengen governance and external borders**, the legal framework is partially aligned with that of the EU. As a recommendation, it is stated that it is necessary to continue strengthening the national Schengen governance by establishing a Schengen Action Plan, which covers the entire Schengen framework.

The legislation on combating **currency counterfeiting** is aligned with EU standards.

As stated in the introduction, because of the importance of this chapter for the overall accession process, it is necessary for the Government to seriously commit to implementing the recommendations, together with Chapter 23: Judiciary and fundamental rights.

Economic criteria

The good level of preparation in terms of a functioning market economy and the moderate level of preparation to cope with the pressure of market forces in European markets when it comes to the economic criteria remain unchanged this year. This year, based on the first segment of the criteria, only "limited progress" is noted, while for the second one, the same "some" level of progress remains.

Functioning market economy

In this segment, the recommendations from last year were only partially implemented and therefore remain largely valid. The Commission calls for particular attention to be paid to the adoption of the remaining regulations for implementing the Budget Law. It calls for compliance with the Union's fiscal rules, including by adopting further revenue-enhancing measures and controlling current spending. This is particularly important in the context of the increase of salaries in the public sector and pensions, as a result of which the planned budget deficit was exceeded. The Commission places emphasis on the implementation of the action plan for public investment management and the adoption of the revised action plan for the formalisation of the informal economy.

Capacity to cope with market forces within the EU

The key findings and recommendations in this area focus on three areas: labour market, transport infrastructure and energy production. Progress is noted in the reform of vocational education, but it is also noted that higher education still suffers from outdated curricula, and the labour market faces a mismatch of required skills. However, the key recommendation refers to increasing financial and human resources to accelerate reforms in the vocational education and training system and the implementation of the Law on Secondary Education. The Commission calls for the completion of road corridors VIII and X, as key projects in transport infrastructure, and increasing the use of renewable energy capacities, including the adoption of a new Law on Renewable Energy Sources. The report indicates that projects to improve road and rail infrastructure, as well as the digitalisation of public services, can have a positive impact on the competitiveness of domestic companies.

Chapter 5. Public procurements

Just like in 2023 and 2024, this year again the EC assesses North Macedonia as **moderately prepared, with limited progress** achieved with the updated version of the electronic public procurement system. Last year's recommendations were partially implemented and remain valid. In the coming period, the Commission concludes that there is a delay in finalising the Law on Public Private Partnership and recommends its adoption. In the context of the developed guidelines for the use of qualitative award criteria, the application of the most economically advantageous tender (MEAT) criterion, which is currently limited, is recommended. Last but not least is the recommendation to strengthen control in public procurement, improve coordination in the fight against corruption and strengthen the capacities to implement the principles of transparency, competition, equal treatment and non-discrimination.

Chapter 18. Statistics

This year, as in 2024, the European Commission assesses the country as **moderately to well prepared**, in contrast to moderately prepared in 2023, which is due to the achieved high level of compliance of the statistical infrastructure with EU acquis. Unlike 2023, when **good progress** was noted, which was due to the publication of population census data in December 2022, in 2024 and this year, **some progress** is noted in the area of labour market statistics and robust statistical data transmission. The recommendations of the European Commission from last year have not been fully implemented and remain valid.

Chapter 32: Financial control

This year, as in 2024, North Macedonia is **moderately prepared** for accession, and unlike last year when progress was limited, **some progress** has been noted this year. This is due to the adoption of the **Public Internal Financial Control Law**, after four years being in parliamentary procedure. Therefore, the recommendations have been modified and focus on the implementation of the Public Internal Financial Control Law. From a legislative perspective, the Commission recommends strengthening the independence of the State Audit Office, inter alia, by adopting the Law on State Audit, improving the parliamentary scrutiny over audit reports and strengthening the following up to SAO recommendations.

Cluster 2: Internal market

In Cluster 2. Internal Market, and indeed in the entire report, i.e. in all areas, an improvement in the level of preparation is noted **for one of the nine chapters: 4. Free movement of capital**. This progress is due to meeting the criteria for membership in SEPA, and the amendments to the Law on Foreign Exchange Operations. Chapter 28. Consumer and Health Protection, however, is the only one in this cluster that has better i.e. «some» progress compared to last year.

In the remaining 7 chapters, unfortunately, there is no positive trend, neither in the level of preparation nor in regard to progress. The Commission explicitly assesses that the recommendations have not been implemented and repeats them in full. As in last year's report, this year too, we have no progress at all in five of the nine chapters in this cluster (see annex).

Meeting the obligations in this Cluster is necessary in order to seize the opportunities of the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, as well as to implement the Common Regional Market Action Plan. Incomplete alignment with the *acquis* is highlighted, as well as a lack of capacity and staff in key chapters in this context, including among others in 1. Free movement of goods; 2 Freedom of movement for workers; 3. Right of establishment and freedom to provide services; and 7. Intellectual property law.

Last but not least, the rule of law and the fight against corruption are key to stable and predictable rules on EU markets. The Commission points to the need for greater commitment to the fight against corruption related to market oversight and product safety, and to strengthening integrity and prevention of corruption in the areas of health and employment measures.

Cluster 3. Competitiveness and inclusive growth

In most areas covered by Cluster 3. Competitiveness and Inclusive growth, North Macedonia is **moderately prepared, with limited implementation of last year's recommendations**. Positive progress can be noted in: Chapter 10: Digital transformation and media; Chapter 25: Science and research; and Chapter 29: Customs union. As regards Digital transformation and media, some progress has been noted thanks to the adoption of four key laws on digital transformation, the Cybersecurity Strategy and the long-term ICT Strategy with an Action Plan and the improvement of the National e-Services Portal, which were also included in the Reform Agenda. As regards Chapter 16: Taxation, limited progress has been noted due to the adoption of the Law on a Minimum Global Corporate Profit Tax, aligned with the EU directive and OECD standards. As regards Chapter 17: Economic and monetary policy, for the third year in a row, the country has made some progress, with calls for full implementation of the Budget Law, development of an integrated financial management system and further strengthening of the independence of the National Bank. As regards Chapter 19: Social policy and employment, there has been limited progress, with a new recommendation to align with EU directives on equality, work-life balance, pay transparency and women on boards, in particular due to the high number of reports of discrimination during hiring, usually in the public sector. The social dialogue is still weak, and the Law on Peaceful Settlement of Labour Disputes has not been implemented.

As regards Chapter 20: Enterprise and industrial policy, the progress is lower compared to 2024. Although the National Development Strategy 2024-2044 and the Strategy for the Development of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises 2025-2030 were adopted, there is a lack of systemic dialogue with the business community, coordination between institutions and assessment of the policies' impact. The fight against the shadow economy and administrative simplifications stagnates, and support measures continue to be overlapped and non-transparent. The significance of this chapter has been additionally highlighted since last year, because tackling the informal economy is part of the steps included in the Reform Agenda.

As regards Chapter 25: Science and research, good progress is noted thanks to the implementation of the Action Plan for the Smart Specialisation Strategy 2024-2027 and the increased budget for science. As regards Chapter 26: Education and culture, there has been limited progress, with the adoption of the Law on Adult Education and the Law on Vocational Education and Training, but the new Law on Secondary Education was postponed again. As regards culture, the adoption of the Strategy for Cultural Development 2023-2027 has been delayed, and the Ministry of Culture needs to strengthen the capacities and preparations of Skopje as the European Capital of Culture for 2028.

As regards Chapter 29: Customs union, **good progress is noted** after two years of limited progress in the consolidation and upgrading of IT systems, including the successful completion and launch of the New Computerised Transit System (NCTS) Phase 5, ratification of the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products, and high level of alignment of the legislation with the Union Customs Code (UCC). This brings Chapter 29 back to being one of the leading chapters with good progress, in addition to the high level of alignment.

Cluster 4. The Green Agenda and sustainable connectivity

As regards Cluster 4 the country remains **moderately prepared with limited progress and identical scores to last year**. Concerning Chapter 14: Transport policy and Chapter 15: Energy, there is moderate advance in the level of preparation, with some progress, just like last year. The progress in Chapter 14 is due to the Trubarevo multimodal node, while in Chapter 15: Energy, the progress is due to the adoption of the Just Transition annual implementation plan for 2025 and the new Law on Energy, which are part of the Reform Agenda. The energy sector sent a positive signal with the establishment of a new Ministry of Energy, Mining and Mineral Resources, but institutional strengthening is needed.

As regards Chapter 21: Trans-European Networks of the 2025 Report the country remains at a **good level of preparation**, but still **limited progress** is underlined. The recommendations from last year have not been implemented, thus the 2025 report repeats and even emphasises the need to strengthen the operational and technical capacities of all institutions and stakeholders, to harmonise the legal framework and to increase compliance with the Trans-European Network Regulation, as well as to mobilise sufficient resources to implement the goals and deadlines set out in the Transport Community's five-year rolling work plan.

Even in 2025, in regard to Chapter 27: Environment and climate change, the country once again shows **some level of preparation and limited progress**. The European Commission assesses that last year's recommendations have been partially implemented, but it repeats them in 2025, emphasising the need to strengthen administrative and inspection capacities, coordination with the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, adoption of the Law on Climate Change, full implementation of the National Energy and Climate Plan, as well as operational activation of the Climate Change Department under the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning.

As last year, we emphasise that this cluster is crucial for securing and utilising the funds from the Western Balkans Growth Plan, which is why efforts should be made to implement its recommendations as soon as possible.

Cluster 5. Resources, agriculture and cohesion

As regards Cluster 5. Resources, agriculture and cohesion, the country remains **moderately prepared, but with limited progress after the lower progress rating in comparison to last year**. The country remains moderately prepared as regards **Chapter 11: Agriculture and rural development**, but unlike last year when this was one of the chapters with good progress, this year the European Commission notes some progress. The focus is on the need to finalise the new Law on Agriculture and Rural Development and to strengthen its policy framework for support in the areas of agriculture support and common market organisation. This year, the novelty in this chapter is the additional focus on the fight against corruption, where the European Commission emphasises that IPARD bodies have an obligation to prevent, detect and report irregularities.

As regards **Chapter 12: Food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy**, there are no significant changes, again showing a **good level of preparation with some progress**, which is due to fighting animal diseases, strengthening of phytosanitary control of plants and implementing pest eradication measures, based on the inputs of phytosanitary monitoring programmes. This chapter is one of the chapters with the highest level of preparation for membership, and it is the best assessed in terms of preparation in comparison to all other candidate countries. As an extremely important chapter, it requires willingness to keep it like that by ensuring better progress.

As regards **Chapter 13: Fisheries**, the level of preparation remains moderate, but progress is lower than last year. The Commission recommends strengthening controls against illegal fishing and improving administrative structures for policy management. The recommendation to improve the controls of fish stock management and of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing by introducing a catch certification system, which was a novelty last year, remains valid this year as well.

As regards **Chapter 22: Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments**, North Macedonia is assessed as **moderately prepared with limited progress** during the reporting period. Last year's recommendations are still valid, and the assessment of the capacity for utilising EU funds is still a cause for concern. The adoption of the Decree on Public Investment Management for projects' evaluation and prioritisation in April 2025, and of the new Law on Administrative Servants in July 2025 is noted, and the need to improve the classification of jobs and the payment system is indicated, for the purpose of ensuring

stability and retention of the staff working on EU integration. Although the European Commission notes an improved quality in programming through sector working groups, it underlines weak coordination, poor central reporting and monitoring hinder IPA reporting quality. Once again, just like in the years before, we would like to emphasise that the capacity in this chapter is crucial for the utilisation of EU funds, but, at the same time, there has been limited or no progress at all for more than ten years, which puts long-term development at risk.

Klasteri 6. Marrëdhëniet e jashtme

The cluster incorporates two chapters, related to two aspects of the external relations of the Union, foreign commercial and foreign-political relations: **Chapter 30. External relations** and **Chapter 31. Foreign, security and defence policy**. As regards Chapter 30, the country is making **some progress** (unlike last year when there was limited progress), which is a direct result of the implementation of the CEFTA protocols and efforts to develop its export control system and a **good level of preparation**. On the other hand, in relation to Chapter 31, there are no changes in the assessment, because there are no significant changes in regard to EC's recommendations, and for three years in a row, a **good level of preparation** and **good progress** have been noted.

CONCLUSIONS

The 2025 report of the European Commission is the 19th report on the country, after the publication of the 2025 analytical report. As a result of the long-term participation in the accession process, North Macedonia has for years maintained a **moderate level of preparation to meet the obligations of membership, but with slow progress**.

In this report, the **areas in which we have not implemented reforms for years** come to the fore again, as well as the strengthening of capacities, despite the fact that the needs are more than obvious. In the Cluster on Fundamentals, the slow progress and stagnation in Chapter 23: Judiciary and fundamental rights is evident, where the interventions, although supported by the Reform Agenda have been delayed. As regards the fight against corruption, which this report treats as a horizontal issue, urgent measures are also needed. Finally, the conditions in the prisons are again in the focus, just like over the past 19 years, without any particular shift.

There are still **good examples** in the chapters, like in food safety and customs, but in the former, the trend of slow progress has been limited for a number of years now. It is necessary for the state to focus on maintaining these positive trends and improve the trends in other clusters and chapters.

This year, part of the positive changes are due to the activities foreseen in the **Growth Plan** and the **Reform Agenda** (such as SEPA, digitalisation and energy), which indicates that this instrument has had a positive impact on progress and should be further used. However, the Reform Agenda cannot be a substitute for the accession process, which requires a much more substantial transformation. Therefore, it is necessary for the Government to use the submitted screening reports to determine the areas to focus on in the short and medium term, so that we do not lose the momentum in the alignment process completely. Measures for implementing the recommendations from the screening reports need to be included in the documents that are the benchmarks for opening the first cluster, as well as in the National Programme for Adoption of the Acquis Communautaire (NPAA), as an already neglected, but key instrument of the accession process.

In contrast to our slow progress, this year there is an accelerated pace of alignment among the other candidate countries. For those reasons, there is a risk that in the short and medium term, we will significantly fall behind the countries with which the European Commission is actively conducting negotiations.

Annex 1 - Level of preparedness and progress⁴

CLUSTER	AREA/CHAPTER	PREPAREDNESS										PROGRESS	
		2016	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2022-2023	2024-2025	
1. FUNDAMENTALS	FUNCTIONING OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	
	• PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	2	
	23. JUDICIARY AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS	2	2	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	1	0	
	• FUNCTIONING OF THE JUDICIARY	2	2	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	1	0	
	• FIGHTING CORRUPTION	2	2	2	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	0	0	
	• FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION	2	2	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	1	1	
	24. JUSTICE, FREEDOM AND SECURITY	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	1	
	• FIGHTING ORGANISED CRIME	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2.5	2.5	2	1	
	FUNCTIONAL MARKET ECONOMY	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	2	1	
	CAPACITY TO COPE WITH COMPETITIVENESS PRESSURE AND MARKET FORCES IN THE UNION	3	3	3	3	3	3	2.5	3	3	2	2	
	5. PUBLIC PROCUREMENT	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	1	
	18. STATISTICS	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3.5	3.5	2	2	
	32. FINANCIAL CONTROL	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	1	
2. INTERNAL MARKET	1. FREE MOVEMENT OF GOODS	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	0	
	2. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT FOR WORKERS	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	
	3. RIGHT OF ESTABLISHMENT AND FREEDOM TO PROVIDE SERVICES	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	1	
	4. FREE MOVEMENT OF CAPITAL	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.5	1	3	
	6. COMPANY LAW	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	0	0	
	7. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY LAW	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	0	
	8. COMPETITION POLICY	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	0	
	9. FINANCIAL SERVICES	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	
	28. CONSUMER AND HEALTH PROTECTION	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	2	
3. COMPETITIVENESS AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH	10. INFORMATION SOCIETY AND MEDIA	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	2	
	16. TAXATION	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	1	
	17. ECONOMIC AND MONETARY POLICY	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.5	3.5	3.5	2	2	
	19. SOCIAL POLICY AND EMPLOYMENT	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	
	20. ENTERPRISE AND INDUSTRIAL POLICY	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.5	3.5	2	0	
	25. SCIENCE AND RESEARCH	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	3	
	26. EDUCATION AND CULTURE	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	1	
	29. CUSTOMS UNION	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	1	3	
4. GREEN AGENDA AND SUSTAINABLE CONNECTIVITY	14. TRANSPORT POLICY	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	
	15. ENERGY	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	
	21. TRANS-EUROPEAN NETWORKS	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	1	1	
	27. ENVIRONMENT	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	
5. RESOURCES, AGRICULTURE AND COHESION	11. AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	
	12. FOOD SAFETY, VETERINARY AND PHYTOSANITARY POLICY	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	2	
	13. FISHERIES	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	2	
	22. REGIONAL POLICY AND COORDINATION OF STRUCTURAL INSTRUMENTS	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	1	
	33. FINANCIAL AND BUDGETARY PROVISIONS	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
6. EXTERNAL RELATIONS	30. EXTERNAL RELATIONS	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	1	2	
	31. FOREIGN, SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	

⁴ The spheres and areas for which the Report provides uniform grades that can be determined are indicated.

Overview of preparedness ratings:

Assessment	Numerical value
At an early stage	1
Some level of preparation	2
Moderately prepared	3
Good level of preparation	4
Well advanced	5

Overview of progress ratings:

Assessment	Numerical value
Backsliding	(-4)-(-1)
No progress	0
Limited progress	1
Some progress	2
Good progress	3
Very good progress	4

