

Draft Council Conclusions

1. Reiterating its 14 December 2021 conclusions, the Council welcomes the continued determination of North Macedonia to advance the EU reform agenda and deliver tangible and sustained result.
2. On North Macedonia's path towards membership to the European Union, the Council recalls the importance of achieving tangible results and implementing in good faith bilateral agreements, including the Prespa Agreement with Greece and the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation with Bulgaria.
3. In this regard, it welcomes the agreement on the protocol from the second meeting of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission established under article 12 of this Treaty. This important step will contribute to the good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, which remain essential elements of the enlargement process as well as of the Stabilization and Association Process.
4. It will also enable to strengthen the equal rights of persons belonging to minorities and communities in North Macedonia, and as such, will contribute to the compliance with the Copenhagen political criteria. The Council welcomes in this respect the intention of North Macedonia to launch and achieve as a matter of priority the relevant constitutional changes, with a view to including in the Constitution citizens who live within the borders of the state and who are part of other people, such as Bulgarians.
5. Taking fully into account these progress and the uninterrupted compliance in all areas identified by the Council in June 2018, the Council has decided to approve the Negotiating Framework and to hold, in accordance with the Enhanced Methodology and the decision to open accession negotiation taken on 25 March 2020 a political intergovernmental conference with North Macedonia on *[placeholder : date]*, in order to present the next steps of the enlargement process after the adoption of the Negotiating Framework, as described in the "EU opening statement".
6. In order to complete this accession negotiations opening phase, the Council also decides to convene another intergovernmental conference with a view to presenting the Negotiating Framework and a state of play of the preparatory works by the Commission and stands ready to hold it without further delays nor additional political decision, as

soon as North Macedonia has implemented its commitment to complete the aforementioned constitutional changes, in line with its internal procedures.

7. In this perspective, the Council notes that the Commission has advanced its work to carry out and complete the process of analytical examination of the EU acquis and stands ready to present in due time its results to North Macedonia. On this basis, it invites the Commission to continue to assess the state of preparation of North Macedonia for opening negotiations in specific areas and identify the issues that will most likely come up in the negotiations, starting with the fundamentals' cluster, which, in accordance with the Negotiating Framework, will be opened first once North Macedonia has met the relevant criteria agreed by the Council.