

Screening report

North Macedonia

Cluster 6 – External Relations

Chapter 30: External relations

Date of screening meetings:

Explanatory meeting: 26 September 2023

Bilateral meeting: 6 December 2023

Chapter 31: Foreign, Security and Defence Policy

Date of screening meetings:

Explanatory meeting: 27 September 2023

Bilateral meeting: 7 December 2023

PREAMBLE

After the first Intergovernmental Conference on accession negotiations with North Macedonia in July 2022, the Commission immediately launched the screening process.

The screening is based on the enhanced enlargement methodology, which was adopted in 2020 and organises the negotiating chapters in thematic clusters in order to inject dynamism into the negotiating process and to foster cross-fertilisation of efforts beyond individual chapters. These thematic clusters bring together the chapters / areas according to broader themes and will allow a stronger focus on core sectors. Within each individual cluster, screening is carried out through meetings on a chapter-by-chapter basis. The substance of those clusters and chapters, as set out in Annex II of the negotiating framework, mirror the requirements for membership stemming from the Copenhagen criteria.

This report provides an assessment of where North Macedonia stands in terms of alignment and capacity to apply the *acquis* in cluster 6. The negotiating framework also refers to the possibility of accelerated integration. At the bilateral meetings North Macedonia has requested participation in certain areas before accession. This report provides the Commissions opinion and answer to these requests.

Regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations remain essential elements of the enlargement process.

It is important to continue the dialogue with civil society and other stakeholders, with the aim of ensuring the support of citizens for the EU accession process. North Macedonia is expected to strategically communicate the benefits and obligations of the accession process to its public.

A) INTRODUCTION

The enhanced enlargement methodology¹, as reflected in the Negotiating Framework with North Macedonia, puts the negotiating chapters of the EU *acquis* into clusters. The **External Relations** cluster includes two chapters of the EU *acquis*:

- Under Chapter 30, **External Relations** covers EU legislation in the area of the common commercial policy stemming from both the EU's multilateral and bilateral trade commitments, and from a number of autonomous preferential trade measures. It also covers the EU's **humanitarian aid and development policy**
- Under Chapter 31, **Foreign, Security and Defence Policy** covers the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and the common security and defence policy (CSDP) and is based on legal acts, including legally binding international agreements, and on political documents.

The chapters under the **External Relations cluster** should not be seen in isolation, as several have **commonalities and so interact with each other** to be mutually reinforcing. For example, **External Relations** and the **Foreign, Security, and Defence Policy** are closely related in defining and shaping the EU foreign action.

This **screening report is structured** according to the **respective areas and chapters** of the cluster. Each area/chapter starts with a short overview of the **main content of the EU *acquis* / European standards**. Each thematic area within a chapter then first summarises the **country's presentations² and the outcome of the expert discussions** at the bilateral screening meeting, followed by the **Commission's assessment** in chapter 30 and **assessment** in chapter 31.

In the last **section**, from its findings the Commission draws **recommendations for the next steps in the accession negotiations process in the present cluster**.

North Macedonia stated that it accepts the *acquis* in the chapters of cluster 6. It reserved however the right to request transitional arrangements in certain limited areas of the *acquis* in this cluster at a later stage in the negotiations.

¹ COM(2020) 57 final.

² All national institutions and ministries are referenced as per their official name during the period of the screening meetings.

B) CHAPTER 30 – EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The EU has a **common commercial policy** towards third countries, based on multilateral and bilateral agreements and autonomous measures. There are also EU rules in the field of **humanitarian and development policy**.

Art. 207 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union³ sets out the rules on EU **common commercial policy**. The EU *acquis* in the field of the common commercial policy consists mainly of directly binding EU legislation which does not require transposition into national law. This EU legislation results from the EU's multilateral and bilateral trade commitments, as well as from a number of autonomous preferential trade measures and specific trade rules. In the area of export, credits and export controls of dual-use goods, some elements of the *acquis* require earlier preparations in order to have fully capable administrations from the day of accession. Applicant countries are required to progressively align their policies towards third countries and their positions within international organisations (particularly the World Trade Organisation [WTO]) with the policies and positions adopted by the Union.

In the area of **humanitarian aid and development policy**, EU Member States need to comply with EU legislation and international commitments and ensure the capacity to participate in the EU's development and humanitarian policies. Candidate countries are required to progressively align their policies towards third countries and its positions within international organisations with the policies and positions adopted by the Union and its Member States.

I. COMMON COMMERCIAL POLICY

I.A INSTITUTIONAL ELEMENTS

a. Country presentation

The International Trade Cooperation Department within the Ministry of Economy is responsible for the policy-making and coordination of trade policies. The department is composed of three units dedicated to trade regime, bilateral trade cooperation and multilateral trade cooperation, respectively. It is headed by a head of department and managed by a state councilor, and employs 11 staff members.

b. Commission assessment

Overall, North Macedonia is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* in the field of the common commercial policy. The country needs to apply all the directly binding EU legislation in this field by the date of accession.

While the institutional set-up and coordination mechanism are in place, administrative capacity needs to be enhanced to ensure that North Macedonia's international agreements are brought in conformity with the EU *acquis* and that all the directly binding EU legislation is effectively applied by the date of accession. Continuous capacity building and awareness-raising activities are required to increase the skill levels of the staff and inform the business community about the impacts and benefits deriving from the application of the EU common commercial policy upon accession.

I.B MULTILATERAL FRAMEWORK OF THE COMMON COMMERCIAL POLICY – WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION

a. Country presentation

³ Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union Protocols Annexes to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union Declarations annexed to the Final Act of the Intergovernmental Conference which adopted the Treaty of Lisbon, signed on 13 December 2007, OJ C 202, 7.6.2016, p. 1–388.

Within the multilateral framework of the common commercial policy, North Macedonia continues to keep its trade policy aligned with that of the EU in the WTO. Regarding goods, North Macedonia's most favoured nation (MFN) average bound rate is 7%, 13% for agricultural goods and 6% for industrial products. In 2023, the average applied rate was 6.5%, 12.9% for agricultural products and 5.4% for industrial products⁴.

The country became a member of the WTO on 4 April 2003. Since then, North Macedonia has accepted and ratified two multilateral instruments: in 2010 the Protocol Amending the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement, and in 2015, the Protocol concerning the Trade Facilitation Agreement. It is a party to the plurilateral agreements on the Civil Aircraft Agreement and has become since October 2023 a party to the Government Procurement Agreement (GPA)⁵. The country also participates in the joint initiatives on E-commerce moratorium; Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform; and on Trade and environmental sustainability.

b. Commission assessment

North Macedonia aligns its foreign trade policy with that of the EU in the WTO. It has not had any dispute settlement case within the WTO since its membership. North Macedonia still needs to accept the Protocol of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and perform the certification procedure for the Service Domestic Regulation initiative.

I.C REGIONAL/BILATERAL FRAMEWORK OF THE COMMON COMMERCIAL POLICY

a. Country presentation

Within the **bilateral and regional framework of the common commercial policy**, North Macedonia applies six Free Trade Agreements (FTA): with Türkiye since 2000, Ukraine since 2001, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) since 2002, the European Union under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) since 2004; the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) since 2007; and the United Kingdom since 2021. The FTAs cover all industrial products since 2011 and include a high level of liberalisation of agricultural products, except within CEFTA which fully liberalises trade in industrial goods and agriculture. Over 86% of North Macedonia's trade is covered by its FTAs; 70% of which is covered by the EU and CEFTA. All the FTAs include a denouncement or withdrawal and expiration clause upon EU accession. There are no ongoing negotiations for new trade agreements.

North Macedonia has concluded bilateral investment agreements (BITs) with 41 countries, of which 39 are in force, two signed and ratified only by North Macedonia. Out of these 41 agreements, 18 agreements are with EU Member States. The government is in the process of adopting a new model for BITs in line with EU standards. It also plans to establish a coordinating body for the purpose of early prevention and mediation of investment disputes before international arbitrations.

North Macedonia plans to denounce its free trade agreements upon accession to the EU and bring all of its other international agreements in conformity with the EU *acquis* by the time of accession.

b. Commission assessment

North Macedonia has six free trade agreements, all of which include a termination clause. The country needs to denounce all its free trade agreements on the last day before accession and apply the EU common customs tariff for all products and services.

All non-preferential agreements will need to be brought in line with the EU *acquis* by the date of accession. North Macedonia has 39 active bilateral investment treaties. The country needs to terminate all bilateral investment treaties (including the effects of any sunset clause) concluded with EU Member States on the last day before accession. From the day of accession, North Macedonia also needs to implement Regulation

⁴ WTO reference paper MK_E.pdf (wto.org).

⁵ Law on ratification of the Decision to the Public Procurement Agreement (GAP), Official Gazette No.188/2023.

(EU) 1219/2012 establishing transitional arrangements for bilateral investment agreements between Member States and Third Countries.

I.D THE EU'S AUTONOMOUS TRADE PREFERENTIAL REGIMES

a. Country presentation

North Macedonia does not apply a **Generalised System of Preferences (GSP)** but is a beneficiary of the GSP of other countries⁶. The country also benefits from the EU's unilateral **autonomous trade preferences** on certain agricultural products laid out in Regulation (EU) 2024/823 on exceptional trade measures for countries and territories participating in or linked to the Stabilisation and Association Process, which applies until the end of 2025. The legal framework for preferential origin of goods in the national legislation is laid down in the Customs Law⁷ and in its Implementing Regulation⁸.

b. Commission assessment

Upon accession, North Macedonia will cease to benefit from the GSP of the current list of donor countries and will need to apply the EU's GSP⁹ and autonomous trade measures.

I.E TRADE SPECIFIC RULES

a. Country presentation

The legal and institutional framework for **export control of dual-use items** is regulated by the Law on Export control of dual use items¹⁰ and the Decision on the Establishment of the national control list of dual use items¹¹. More specific guidelines on the application for export licences are provided in bylaws¹². The legislation is **partially aligned** with Regulation (EU) 2021/821 setting up a Union Regime for the Control of Exports, brokering, technical assistance, transit and transfer of dual-use items (recast), while the national dual use list is fully aligned with the EU list within the scope of the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2023/66 as regards the List of Dual-Use Items. The e-licensing system for strategic goods is operational since May 2023 allowing for issuing export, brokering and transit authorisations of dual use items as well as end user certificates. The e-licensing system is set to become operational and fully replacing paper licenses by the end of 2025. It plans to adopt a new draft law on export control fully aligning with Regulation (EU) 2021/821 by the end of 2024, except for the provisions that become applicable only upon accession. It also plans to develop guidelines for establishing an internal compliance programme by the end of 2025 as well as provide regular updates on the dual-use item list and training to competent customs officers.

In terms of the institutional set-up, the Unit for Trade Regime within the Ministry of Economy is responsible for the policy-making, in cooperation with the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, the General Secretariat of the Government and Customs Administration. The Export Control Commission of Dual Use Items functions under the Ministry of Economy. The Commission is staffed by 6 representatives from the abovementioned institutions.

There is no legislation governing the **screening of foreign direct investments** in North Macedonia. In this regard, the country plans to adopt new legislation by the end of 2025 and to have a fully functional mechanism by 2026, while following closely EU developments in this field.

⁶ Donors are Australia, Japan, New Zealand and the United States.

⁷ Article 26.

⁸ Articles 31-60.

⁹ The EU GSP is governed by Regulation EU 978/2012, which has been extended until December 2027.

¹⁰ Official Gazette No. 82/05; 84/07; 158/10; 136/11; 199/14; 191/15; 53/16 and 215/21.

¹¹ Official Gazette No. 121/23.

¹² Official Gazette No. 111/11 and No. 31/06.

As of 2024, there is no medium and long-term **export credit** support programmes nor government-backed export credit agency in North Macedonia. The Development Bank of North Macedonia as a competent authority provides for short-term export credits and insurances for companies¹³.

By the time of accession, North Macedonia has committed to be ready to apply relevant EU trade rules specific to conflict minerals, shipments of waste, the International Procurement Instrument and the Anti-Coercion Instrument.

b. Commission assessment

North Macedonia is **partially aligned** with the **dual-use export control** *acquis*. The Law on Export Control of Dual Use Items regulates export control of dual-use items partially applies Regulation (EU) 2021/821, while the national dual use list is aligned with the EU list within the scope of the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2023/66. The e-licensing system for strategic goods is operational since May 2023. The country needs to complete the alignment of its legislation with Regulation (EU) 2021/821 and make the e-licensing system fully operational. Regular updates on the dual-use items lists and training of the customs administration need to continue. An early accession to the **Wassenaar Arrangement (WA)**, the **Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG)** and the **Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)** would complement this engagement. Additionally, North Macedonia is invited to consider the possibility of becoming an adherent to the **Australia Group (AG)**¹⁴, as a positive step towards alignment with the EU *acquis* and towards future AG membership.

North Macedonia is in the process of developing national legislation on the **screening of foreign direct investments** with a view to have a fully functional system by 2026.

Currently North Macedonia, according to their own statement, does not operate any **medium or long-term export credit scheme**, which would be subject to regulations under this chapter.

The country needs to apply the evolving EU trade *acquis* from the day of accession, in this regard, and the competent authority responsible for application and enforcement needs to be informed and trained; awareness campaigns also need to be organised for the benefit of trade operators.

I.F TRADE DEFENCE INSTRUMENTS

a. Country presentation

Chapter V of North Macedonia's Trade Law¹⁵ regulates the application of anti-dumping, countervailing and safeguard measures. The Trade Law was notified to WTO on 28 September 2004. North Macedonia has not notified any anti-dumping nor countervailing duty measures to WTO. It has also not filed any dispute settlement case since its accession to WTO.

While bilateral safeguard clauses can be found in all its FTAs, North Macedonia has not applied any trade defence instruments in any of the bilateral or regional FTAs that it has in place.

b. Commission assessment

North Macedonia needs to ensure effective enforcement of EU trade defence measures upon accession.

I.G SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – THE COMMON COMMERCIAL POLICY

¹³ Law on the Development Bank of North Macedonia, Official Gazette No 105/09, 77/21 and 209/23.

¹⁴ The Australia Group offer the possibility for non-members to unilaterally adhere.

¹⁵ Official Gazette No. 16/2004; 150/22.

Overall, North Macedonia is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* in the field of the common commercial policy. The country needs to increase its administrative capacity to effectively apply the EU rules in this field at the time of accession. North Macedonia continues to align its foreign trade policy with that of the EU in the WTO. North Macedonia needs to denounce all its free trade agreements and bring into conformity with the EU *acquis* all its non-preferential agreements on the last day before accession, by which time it needs to apply the EU common customs tariff for all products and services. North Macedonia needs to align its legal framework with Regulation (EU) 2021/821. The country also needs to ensure the necessary administrative capacity to enforce export controls.

II. FOREIGN POLICY INSTRUMENTS

II.A KIMBERLEY PROCESS

a. Country presentation

North Macedonia will apply the EU legislation governing the **Kimberley Process** upon accession. The provisions of the national Law on Control of the Foreign Trade with Rough Diamonds¹⁶ and bylaws¹⁷ are partially aligned with Regulation (EC) 2368/2002 implementing the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme for the International Trade in Rough Diamonds, while full alignment will apply at the time of accession. North Macedonia is not a member of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme regulating the international trade in rough diamonds. Until now there has been no import or export of rough diamonds.

b. Commission assessment

Upon accession, North Macedonia will be part of the Kimberley Process by virtue of its membership of the EU and as such shall apply the rules governing the Kimberley Process at the time of accession. The country has no domestic legislation in place and lacks an accredited authority responsible for implementation. If, upon accession, North Macedonia does not set up a competent authority, it would rely on one of the seven existing Kimberley Process ‘competent authorities’ within the EU. In this context, it needs to get familiar with and apply the ‘Guidelines on Trading with the European Union (EU) A practical guide for Kimberley Process Participants and companies involved in trade in rough diamonds with the EU’¹⁸.

II.B ANTI-TORTURE REGULATION

a. Country presentation

Concerning the **anti-torture legislation**, North Macedonia plans to adopt a law on foreign trade in goods that can be used for capital punishment, torture other cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment partially aligning with the Regulation (EU) 2019/125, the Anti-Torture Regulation, by the end of 2024 and bylaws in 2025. Full alignment with the EU provisions will apply upon the date of accession.

b. Commission assessment

North Macedonia is **not aligned** with the EU Anti-Torture Regulation. It lacks a legal and institutional framework aligning with Regulation (EU) 2019/125. The country is encouraged to proceed with its plans

¹⁶ Official Gazette No.143 from 12/7/2019

¹⁷ Decision to establish a list of participants and the competent authorities appointed to issue and validate their certificates based on relevant information from the chair and/or participants of the Kimberley process (Official Gazette No. 183 from 10/7/2020); Rulebook on the form and content of the monthly report on certificates submitted for export as well as import verification, on the form and content of the rough diamond export certificate, and on the form and content of the request for issuing a certificate for the export of rough diamonds (Official Gazette No.99 from 13/4/2020)

¹⁸ C(2021) 4480 final of 25.6.2021 available here: https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-07/guidelines_on_trading_with_the_european_union.pdf.

to adopt the legislative instruments in the coming years and build its administrative capacities to enforce the rules. Full alignment needs to be made with the EU anti-torture legislation, and efficient enforcement of the rules needs to be ensured upon accession.

II.C SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – FOREIGN POLICY INSTRUMENTS

North Macedonia will need to apply the rules governing the Kimberley Process at the time of accession.

North Macedonia is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* on anti-torture. The country still needs to align its legal framework with the remaining provisions of Regulation (EU) 2019/125. Efficient enforcement of the rules in this field needs to be ensured upon accession.

III. EXTERNAL ACTION POLICY

a. Country presentation

North Macedonia is committed to embedding the objectives, principles and values governing EU activities in this field in its foreign policy structures.

There is currently no specific domestic **policy or regulatory framework on development cooperation and aid** in place. North Macedonia does not have any aid budget for developing countries nor an agency responsible for development cooperation. The country plans to establish a legal framework for international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance by the end of 2025, providing for a strategic framework and principles and provisions for development cooperation and humanitarian aid to third countries. The proposed framework is also intended to lay down competences, coordination and implementation of development cooperation and humanitarian aid and its monitoring.

North Macedonia supports the objectives laid down in the new Agenda for the Mediterranean in the framework of the **EU Southern Neighbourhood Policy**. It became a full member of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in November 2022 and informs of the country's active involvement in its working bodies and all forms of dialogues at political and expert level, with a special focus on inter-cultural dialogue and future cooperation with the Anna Lind Foundation.

North Macedonia is committed to the implementation of the **United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹⁹. The Sustainable Development Report 2023 ranks North Macedonia 60th with a score 72,47 out of 100. The country's national documents are aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2021–2025. The National Strategy for Sustainable Development was adopted by the government in 2010²⁰. The National Council for Sustainable Development is entrusted with its implementation, consisting of representatives from the ministries, academia, business, and non-governmental organisations²¹. The Government is responsible for the overall coordination of sustainable development aspects. Together with the UN Resident Coordinator Office, the Cabinet has led the work of a gap assessment of alignment needs with a view to mainstream the SDGs and Agenda 2030 objectives into the national strategies and policy documents. In addition, the aim of a project, funded by the Green Climate Fund Readiness programme, is to upgrade the e-government system allowing for monitoring the implementation of the SDGs by using real-time data.

b. Commission assessment

Overall, North Macedonia is committed to the EU policy and principles guiding its international partnerships. The country lacks a domestic policy and regulatory framework for development cooperation.

¹⁹ Governmental decision no 42-389/1 from 20.01.2016.

²⁰ Governmental session on 12.01.2010.

²¹ Governmental decision (Official Gazette no. 08 from 21.01.2010 and amendment nr. 186 from 08.10.2018).

North Macedonia is encouraged to develop a legal framework covering international cooperation and development policies in accordance with EU policies and principles as well as its international commitments. Such steps include strengthening administrative capacities and the establishment of a development agency.

c. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – EXTERNAL ACTION POLICY

Overall, North Macedonia is committed to the EU policy and principles guiding its international partnerships. The country lacks the regulatory and policy framework for development cooperation and is encouraged to establish a legal framework covering international cooperation and development policy aligning with EU policies and principles.

IV. HUMANITARIAN AID POLICY

a. Country presentation

North Macedonia is committed to the EU policies and principles governing the provision of humanitarian aid.

North Macedonia lacks the legal and policy framework covering humanitarian aid towards non-EU countries aligned with EU policies and principles. On the basis of the Law on Protection and Rescue, the government may decide to send humanitarian assistance for the purpose of protection and rescue to third countries as well as to receive humanitarian assistance for these purposes from other countries. The country has provided humanitarian assistance on the occasions of floods in Serbia in May 2014 and in Bosnia and Herzegovina in December 2022 (EUR 100 000), earthquakes in Albania in November 2019 and Türkiye in February 2023 (EUR 100 000 respectively), and the war in Ukraine since 2022 (EUR 100 000). The country plans to establish a legal framework for international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance by the end of 2025, providing for a strategic framework and principles and provisions for development cooperation and humanitarian aid to third countries. The proposed framework is also intended to lay down competences, coordination and implementation of development cooperation and humanitarian aid and its monitoring.

b. Commission assessment

Overall, North Macedonia is committed to the EU policies and principles governing the provision of humanitarian aid. The country lacks however a domestic policy and regulatory framework for humanitarian aid. The country has nevertheless provided assistance on the occasion of floods and earthquakes to its neighbouring countries and regions. It has also provided support to Ukraine in the context of the ongoing war. Such *ad hoc* assistance has been granted on the basis of the Law on Protection and Rescue Operations, which also allows assistance to be provided to third countries. North Macedonia is encouraged to develop a legal framework covering humanitarian aid to non-EU countries in accordance with EU policies and principles.

c. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – HUMANITARIAN AID POLICY

Overall, North Macedonia is committed to the EU policy and principles guiding the provision of humanitarian aid. The country lacks the regulatory and policy framework for humanitarian aid and is encouraged to establish a legal framework covering humanitarian aid policy to third countries aligning with EU policies and principles.

V. FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION - EXTERNAL RELATIONS

a. Country presentation

North Macedonia has the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest²². The Law is complemented by a National Strategy for the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest, including an Action Plan for 2021-2025. The National Strategy covers the methodology for assessment of corruption risks, assessment of risk factors, and determination of corruption risks particularly related to the spending of public money and abuse of official positions in the public sector. At sectoral level, the Ministry of Economy has adopted an integrity policy and assigned an integrity officer.

b. Assessment

North Macedonia has a legal framework as well as a national strategy and action plan in place for fighting corruption. The Ministry of Economy in charge of foreign trade policies has also adopted an integrity policy and assigned an integrity officer. North Macedonia needs to continue the fight against corruption through effective enforcement of the anti-corruption measures, including preventive measures and awareness-raising.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

North Macedonia has a legal framework as well as a national strategy and action plan in place for fighting corruption. The country needs to continue the fight against corruption through effective enforcement of the anti-corruption measures, including preventive measures and awareness-raising.

²² Official Gazette no. 12/19.

C) CHAPTER 31 – FOREIGN, SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

The common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and the common security and defence policy (CSDP) are based on legal acts, including legally binding international agreements, and on political documents. The acquis consists of political declarations, decisions and agreements. Member states must be able to support political dialogue in the framework of CFSP, to align with EU statements, to take part in EU decisions and to apply agreed EU restrictive measures.

I. INSTITUTIONS AND DECISION MAKING PROCESS

a. Country presentation

As regards the institutional and legal framework to carry out foreign and security policy, the President represents the country in international affairs and is the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. The Government determines the general directions of the foreign policy in cooperation with the President including on matters with implications for security and defence that is then exercised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Ministry of Defence and other relevant state organs. International treaties are concluded through a ratification by the Parliament.

In 2023 MFA had a total of 415 staff of which 254 work in the headquarters and 161 in the diplomatic network abroad. North Macedonia's diplomatic network consists of 59 representations of which 44 are embassies, nine general consulates, five permanent missions (including to the EU, UN and OSCE) and one permanent delegation (to NATO).

For the time being North Macedonia does not have formalised posts of Political Director and the European correspondent; however, in practice these roles are carried out by the State Secretary or Director for EU and the Deputy Director or Head of the Unit for Common Foreign and Security Policy in the EU Directorate of the MFA, respectively.

b. Assessment

North Macedonia has the necessary institutional and legal framework to carry out its foreign and security policy. North Macedonia is on track to prepare for the efficient and timely implementation of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and will be able to adapt its administration and capacities in the future. North Macedonia in particular will need to appoint a European correspondent ahead of accession.

c. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS - INSTITUTIONS AND DECISION MAKING PROCESS

North Macedonia is on track to prepare for the efficient and timely implementation of the EU's CFSP. It will need to appoint a European correspondent before accession.

II. POLITICAL DIALOGUE

a. Country presentation

The political dialogue between the EU and North Macedonia has expanded in intensity and level of interaction in recent years, including in the context of North Macedonia's important task as OSCE Chair in 2023. North Macedonia maintains regular political dialogue with a number of third countries in various bilateral and multilateral formats, focusing on its immediate neighbourhood with the aim to build better bilateral and regional relations (including with neighbouring EU Member States). Significant political dialogues and partnerships have been established with the US and Türkiye in particular, while interactions with China have decreased in intensity including in the context of the current "14+1" initiative (Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries). Political dialogues and interactions with Gulf

countries continue to be developed. With regard to Russia and Iran, North Macedonia's positions closely follow those of the EU also in terms of reduced contacts.

North Macedonia continues to actively participate in regional initiatives, including through assuming the chairmanship of South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) until June 2024. North Macedonia aims to further enhance its political dialogue with the EU also in multilateral context. North Macedonia remains committed to incorporating EU foreign policy positions into its bilateral and multilateral political dialogues. North Macedonia has initiated the establishment of an informal group ("Quad") of the 100% CFSP aligners among the Western Balkan partners. Priorities in the UN, notably for the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues), are in line with the sustainable development goals and the Agenda 2030.

North Macedonia is a party to the majority of international human rights instruments and engages well with monitoring mechanisms.

North Macedonia maintains a proactive engagement in international human rights fora.

As regards **accelerated integration**, North Macedonia requested strengthening and further deepening the political dialogue with the European Union through participation in Foreign Affairs Council meetings (without voting rights), as a country fully aligned with the EU's CFSP.

b. Assessment

The frequent and multi-level exchanges in the context of the EU-North Macedonia political dialogue are instrumental for North Macedonia to maintain full alignment with the EU's CFSP, including in multilateral fora, and to project a constructive approach in its region, which is important to help foster regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations. North Macedonia's efforts to maintain regular political dialogue and outreach to third partners, as well as its active role in the region and in regional initiatives/formats, taking positions that align with the EU values and foreign policy interests is noted. This proved instrumental to a successful OSCE chairmanship in 2023, in a particularly challenging political context. In this respect, North Macedonia's political dialogue activities and close coordination with the EU in relevant international fora contribute to projecting and reinforcing the EU's stance on issues of major international relevance. Human rights priorities should continue to align with the EU's Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2024).

As regards **accelerated integration**, the High Representative in close liaison with the Commission will further explore possibility of strengthening and further deepening the political dialogue with the European Union through participation in Council of Foreign Affairs meetings (without voting rights), as a country fully aligned with the EU's CFSP.

c. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS – POLITICAL DIALOGUE

The EU-North Macedonia political dialogue is instrumental for North Macedonia to maintain **full alignment** with the EU's CFSP, including in multilateral fora, and to project a constructive approach in its region, which is important to help foster regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations. Moreover, close coordination contributes to reinforcing the EU's stance in multilateral fora on issues of major international relevance and was particularly instrumental during North Macedonia's OSCE Chairmanship in 2023.

The EU takes positive notes of North Macedonia's proactive engagement in international and human rights fora. Its priorities in the field of human rights should continue to align with EU's Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2024).

III. COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

III.A COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

a. Country presentation

North Macedonia is committed to full alignment with the EU's CFSP.

North Macedonia has put in place a legal framework for the conduct of CFSP. The Government, in cooperation with the President, formulates the general directions of the foreign policy including on matters with implications for security and defence. The Government also decides on participation in the EU's CFSP and CSDP. At the same time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is in charge for the conduct of the foreign policy and the inter-institutional coordination of foreign affairs, including CFSP alignment and implementation. The coordination of CSDP participation is mainly steered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence. The coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the restrictive measures is executed by the Coordination Body.

b. Assessment

On CFSP, the country's alignment rate with relevant declarations of the High Representative on behalf of the EU and relevant Council Decisions, including on restrictive measures, has remained at 100% since 2022. This included all EU restrictive measures taken following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. To date, there is no data on non-implementation of the obligations of the responsible institutions and no circumvention of sanctions has been detected in North Macedonia.

III.B RESTRICTIVE MEASURES

a. Country presentation

North Macedonia has committed to continuous and sustained support to EU positions on international matters.

The Law no. 190/2017 on Restrictive Measures serves as the legal basis for the application and implementation of EU acts, resolutions adopted by United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and binding acts adopted by other international institutions of which North Macedonia is a member. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiates the process for the introduction of the restrictive measures by submitting to the Government a proposal for a decision for imposing restrictive measures. The decision contains the type/s of the restrictive measure/s; the competent authorities for implementation and the duration of the sanctions. The decision is published in the Official Gazette of North Macedonia, takes immediate effect and is compulsory for the state institutions, legal and natural persons/entities. The coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the restrictive measures is executed by the Coordination Body, established in accordance with the Law on Restrictive Measures. The Coordination Body is chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with participation of the relevant competent institutions and bodies. The Coordination Body does not issue legally binding decisions.

North Macedonia has a 100% alignment rate with EU decisions on restrictive measures.

Regarding **accelerated integration**, North Macedonia has requested to participate in meetings of the expert group on Union Restrictive Measures and Extraterritoriality.

b. Assessment

The Law no. 190/2017 on Restrictive Measures provides a good basis for the application and implementation of EU restrictive measures. By the end of 2025, amendments to the Law should be adopted. As regards implementation of restrictive measures, certain good practices should be highlighted such as the existence of a coordinating body, the central role played by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and regular reporting on implementation by competent authorities to the MFA and the Coordinating Body. It is important to ensure their full and correct implementation. The planned activities for strengthening the efficiency in implementation should continue. Given the complexity of restrictive measures, the full and correct implementation will need to be continuously monitored and verified before accession.

Regarding **accelerated integration**, the High Representative in close liaison with the Commission will further explore possibilities of ad hoc participation in meetings of the expert group on Union Restrictive Measures and Extraterritoriality.

III.C CONFLICT PREVENTION

a. Country presentation

Regarding conflict prevention, North Macedonia cooperates with the EU in the multilateral framework. North Macedonia supports EU policies on conflict prevention as well as EU measures in the area of conflict prevention, with particular attention towards the EU Integrated Approach to Conflicts and Crises, the EU Global Strategy and the most recent Strategic Compass. The country has established structures and mechanisms to identify emerging risks and conflict prevention priorities. North Macedonia considers the Western Balkans as its main priority in the area of conflict prevention and is interested in developing common risk and threat prevention mechanisms in the region. The country also supports the principle of preventive engagement in the spirit of the integrated approach. North Macedonia participates in various conflict prevention and crisis management initiatives, including EU funded missions and operations.

b. Assessment

The legislative and technical framework of North Macedonia on conflict prevention is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis*. North Macedonia should continue to build capacity across the whole conflict cycle, especially to bridge the gap between early warning / early action and therefore link analysis with diplomatic action and programming aimed at mitigating the risks of conflict identified in the spirit of the integrated approach. North Macedonia should also strengthen its engagement on conflict prevention with UN agencies, primarily UNDP, and the OSCE. Finally, North Macedonia should develop specific training programs on peacekeeping, crisis management and conflict prevention, to achieve high quality and modern professional skills in this domain.

III.D NON-PROLIFERATION

a. Country presentation

North Macedonia is party to all major, relevant international conventions and instruments in the non-proliferation and arms control area and aspires to become a member of Wassenaar Arrangement.

North Macedonia has signed up to all major conventions²³ and aligns with EU policy on **weapons of mass destruction** (WMD). North Macedonia has a national Weapons of Mass Destruction Strategy and an action plan for its implementation. North Macedonia has been part of the chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) Centres of Excellence Initiative of the EU and United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) since 2010, and set up a national, intergovernmental CBRN team in 2021.

²³ North Macedonia is state party to the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction (Chemical Weapons Convention or CWC), Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction, Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM) and the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism (ICSANT). North Macedonia is also a party to the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (HCoC) and a signatory to Security Council Resolution 1540.

North Macedonia has a national strategy for **small arms and light weapons** (SALW) and a national action plan for its implementation. It is party to all relevant international conventions and instruments²⁴, North Macedonia has since 2002 participated actively in activities under the EU funded arms control and non-proliferation initiative SEESAC and has been a strong supporter of the Western Balkans Roadmap against illicit arms trafficking since the beginning of the initiative in 2018. North Macedonia is implementing the Roadmap successfully and prepared to continue to do so beyond 2024, the current deadline of the end of the Roadmap. North Macedonia has adopted a number of relevant laws, such as the Law on Export Control and Dual Use Good and Technology and is working on a new law that will fully align with Regulation (EU) 2021/821 Setting up a Union Regime for the Control of Exports, Brokering, Technical Assistance, Transit and Transfer of Dual-Use Items. The Law on Development, Production and Trade of Military Goods, the Law on Examination and Marking of Weapons and Ammunition, as well as the Law on Restrictive Measures are **partially aligned** with the EU common military list. The Law on Weapons is being updated in order to **fully align** with the EU acquis. The national control list is in the process of adoption and contains the EU military list.

b. Assessment

North Macedonia is state party to all relevant international conventions and treaties in the area of non-proliferation and arms control, both in the area of WMD and conventional arms. An early accession to the Wassenaar Arrangement would complement this engagement. Legislation is in place in most areas, except for a few, albeit important, ones. Work on the update of the legislation should be accelerated, as should campaigns vis-à-vis the population on gun ownership and the risks related to illicit arms. North Macedonia is encouraged to continue implementing the Western Balkans Roadmap against Illicit Trafficking and continue contributing to and profit from the regional cooperation and national training that is provided for via the Roadmap.

III.E COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

a. Country presentation

North Macedonia actively contributes to all specialised agencies, programmes, and funds within the UN system. Specific focus is given to UN reform, strengthening the UN's role in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, the 2030 Agenda, climate change and its global impact, sustainable development, implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and promoting the role and participation of women. Most recently, North Macedonia has been a member of UN Commission for Social Development (2020-2024) and it is currently candidate for the UN Human Rights Council (2025-2027), ECOSOC (2027-2029) and the UN Security Council (2042-2043).

North Macedonia chaired the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2023. During the tenure, Ukraine was the top priority.

In the Council of Europe (CoE), North Macedonia is committed to upholding the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), fulfilling obligations from post-monitoring dialogues in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and adhering to the recommendations of the Commissioner for Human Rights. Additionally, the country follows the guidance of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), the European Social Charter, and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, among other obligations.

b. Assessment

At the UN, North Macedonia has stepped up to prevent Russia from being elected to ECOSOC, which required sustained commitment through multiple rounds of voting. This has also helped to prevent Russia

²⁴ These include the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the UN programme of Action, the International Tracing Instrument (ITI), the OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and the Protocol against Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition (The Firearms Protocol).

from being elected to several subsidiary bodies of ECOSOC. North Macedonia's priorities and actions as OSCE Chair in 2023 were in line with and supported important EU priorities. North Macedonia successfully managed the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting, renewing the mandate of the top four positions in the organisation. In the Council of Europe, North Macedonia has consistently aligned with EU statements over the past four years, including those on particularly sensitive and sometimes divisive issues, such as Russia, Armenia/Azerbaijan, homophobia and transphobia, and the Istanbul Convention, among others. This commitment aligns with and supports the policies and priorities of the European Union.

III.F SECURITY MEASURES

a. Country presentation

North Macedonia has put in place the legislation to protect classified information, including the Law on the Protection of Classified Information, which is partially aligned with the EU Council security rules (as certain provisions of the Council security rules are only applicable for EU Member States). It has set up the Directorate for Security of Classified Information. It has a system of central registry and sub-registries, with different control points established within the different state institutions. The updating of the secondary legal acts and by laws that connect to national regulation on the protection of classified information is expected to be concluded by end 2024.

The EU and North Macedonia concluded in 2005 a Security of Information Agreement (SIA) on the mutual protection of classified information and a Security Arrangement for the protection and safeguarding of classified information (2007). North Macedonia is receiving EU classified information up to the level SECRET. Exchange of classified information is done physically, via diplomatic couriers. No electromagnetic transmission of classified information is currently in use.

b. Assessment

Further technical adaptation would be required for North Macedonia to exchange classified information up to the level TRES SECRET UE/ EU TOP SECRET level.

III.G HYBRID THREATS

a. Country presentation

In order to enhance its resilience to hybrid threats, North Macedonia developed a National Strategy for Building Resilience and Dealing with Hybrid Threats with an action plan, covering the period 2021-2025. North Macedonia conducted the hybrid risk survey with the EU in 2019, which also fed into this strategy. The institutional framework foresees the involvement of a broad range of government authorities in countering hybrid threats. As part of a reform of the security sector in 2019, a Council for Coordination was established, with an operational team for cyber security and hybrid threats set up in 2022 within this Council. The action plan foresees several initiatives to be completed by the end of 2025, *inter alia* a new law on critical infrastructure (to be adopted in 2024) and the establishment of a central organ which will monitor and coordinate the response to hybrid threats (by 2025).

b. Assessment

North Macedonia has established structures to deal with hybrid threats to ensure the coordination of various relevant government bodies in a whole of government approach. These coordination functions should continue to be strengthened. North Macedonia should continue using the hybrid risk survey as a basis for further action to update the national approach to countering hybrid threats. The full effect of the National Strategy for Building Resilience and Dealing with Hybrid Threats with an associated action plan, covering the period 2021-2025, will depend on effective implementation. There is the potential for additional action in some areas, for example the Law on Crisis Management dates from 2005 and might benefit from an update, and North Macedonia may wish to consider additional measures in the area of economic security.

III.H FOREIGN INFORMATION MANIPULATION AND INTERFERENCE (FIMI)

a. Country presentation

North Macedonia considers that foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) is a threat that erodes trust in public institutions. The country has been a target of disinformation campaigns during key events, such as the referendum on the Prespa Agreement in 2018, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the NATO and EU accession processes. Russia has been identified as playing a role in these FIMI operations.

To counter hybrid threats, North Macedonia has devised a national strategy (see above) together with an action plan for the period 2021-2025. In addressing FIMI specifically, the country emphasizes building resilience and enhancing communication with the public and among state institutions. Furthermore, North Macedonia is promoting media and information literacy in primary and secondary education. The government also aims to involve civil society and coordinate measures with various stakeholders, including the association of journalists.

b. Assessment

North Macedonia's multiannual plan has the potential to enhance resilience against FIMI. The focus going forward should be to swiftly and effectively implement the plan, adopting a comprehensive approach that involves all relevant state actors and the society at large. Enhanced coordination among state and non-state actors, such as civil society organizations and journalist associations, is key.

The plan and its implementation should align with EU documents and guidelines, such as the EU Action Plan Against Disinformation, the European Democracy Action Plan, and the Strategic Compass. It is essential for the relevant ministries and public institutions to reach a broad consensus on the plan.

Media literacy in North Macedonia is low and requires improvement, including integrating media literacy into formal education. Providing greater support for professional journalism and involving media associations should also be prioritized.

III.I EUROPEAN PEACE FACILITY (EPF)

a. Country presentation

North Macedonia benefits from a 2022 European Peace Facility (EPF) assistance measure aiming to strengthen the capacities of the Balkan Medical Task Force (BMTF), a regional organisation to which North Macedonia is a member. The country also benefits from a 2023 EPF-funded assistance measure to strengthen the capacity of the Armed Forces by enhancing and upgrading the equipment of its light infantry battalion group. Both assistance measures are currently being implemented.

b. Assessment

The country also benefits from a second bilateral assistance measure adopted in 2024, with a view to strengthen the capacity of the Armed Forces. As a recipient of EPF support, North Macedonia understands EPF governance and the necessary administrative and financial requirements for an efficient implementation of EPF support. The EPF support is also expected to contribute to enhancing the country's contribution to EU CSDP military missions and operations, and other international coalitions. As a future contributor to the EPF, North Macedonia needs to ensure that it is able to participate efficiently in the financial and budgetary processes and calls for contributions.

The EU will explore the possibility to further strengthen military and defence cooperation with North Macedonia as relevant in the future including via the EPF.

III.J SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS – COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

North Macedonia has a 100% rate of alignment with relevant declarations of the High Representative on behalf of the EU and Council Decisions, including on all EU restrictive measures following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Given the complexity of restrictive measures, there is scope for strengthening the efficiency in their implementation. The gaps in the legislation aligning with EU *acquis* related to small arms and light weapons should be filled. On security measures, further adaptation of North Macedonia's legal framework would be required to exchange classified information up to the level TRES SECRET UE/ EU TOP SECRET level. On hybrid threats and FIMI, several important initiatives remain to be implemented. As a recipient of EPF support, North Macedonia understands EPF governance and the necessary administrative and financial requirements for an efficient implementation of EPF support. As a future contributor to the EPF, North Macedonia needs to ensure that it is able to participate efficiently in the financial and budgetary processes and calls for contributions.

IV. COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

IV.A CSDP MISSIONS AND OPERATIONS

a. Country presentation

Participation in CSDP military missions and operations is regulated by the Law for Defence and is approved by the Assembly on the proposal of Ministry of Defence approved by the Government. North Macedonia has in place the institutional, legal and decision-making framework concerning the participation in international crisis management missions and operations. North Macedonia continues to actively participate in EUFOR ALTHEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina. North Macedonia also provided a contribution to the (EL-led) EU Battlegroup (HELBROC BG) in 2023 with an affiliated infantry platoon. North Macedonia has requested to participate in civilian CSDP mission.

b. Assessment

North Macedonia has been providing a valuable contribution to CSDP missions and operations. The decision to participate in the EU Battlegroups and the intention to participate in civilian CSDP missions are welcome.

IV.B PERMANENT STRUCTURED COOPERATION PESCO

a. Country presentation

As regards **accelerated integration**, North Macedonia would be interested in participating in projects under the Permanent Structured Cooperation on defence (PESCO), in particular in joining the project on military mobility, emphasizing its connection to NATO Capability Targets. North Macedonia is also interested to join the PESCO project "EU Cyber Academy and Innovation Hub", led by Portugal. This would support the ongoing work at national level to establish a Cyber Security and Digital Forensics Institute.

b. Assessment

As regards **accelerated integration** the High Representative, in close liaison with the Commission, considers favourably North Macedonia applications to participate in PESCO projects. As a Member States-driven framework, any requests from third States for participation in PESCO projects are in a first step evaluated by the individual project and need to be approved by Member States. North Macedonia could benefit from additional EU support to better understand the necessary steps to be taken both at the project level and the EU level.

IV.D SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS – COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

The institutional and legal framework for North Macedonia's participation in **CSDP missions and operations** is in place. North Macedonia has continued to participate in EU crisis management missions and operations, notably in EUFOR ALTHEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina and EUTM RCA in the

Central African Republic and contributed to the EU Multinational Battlegroup (HELBROC BG) in 2023. North Macedonia would be interested to participate in PESCO projects.

V. FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION - FOREIGN, SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICIES

a. Country presentation

North Macedonia has the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest²⁵. The Law is complemented by a National Strategy for the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest, including an Action Plan for 2021-2025. The National Strategy covers the methodology for assessment of corruption risks, assessment of risk factors, and determination of corruption risks particularly related to the spending of public money and abuse of official positions in the public sector.

b. Assessment

North Macedonia has a legal framework as well as a national strategy and action plan in place for fighting corruption which also covers the areas of Foreign, Security and Defence policies.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

North Macedonia has a legal framework as well as a national strategy and action plan in place for fighting corruption. The country needs to continue the fight against corruption through effective enforcement of the anti-corruption measures, including preventive measures and awareness-raising.

²⁵ Official Gazette no. 12/19.