RENMUN XI

REJUVENATION



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Chair Report #1
European Union

Reevaluating the current state of North Macedonian accession to the EU

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Chair Introduction

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the European Union at RENMUN XI! We are Kaden and Yoyo, G10/Y11 students from Sha Tin College and St. Paul's Convent School respectively, and we're extremely honoured to be serving as your chairs at this iteration of RENMUN. We hope you are as excited as we are for the debate that will unequivocally ensue.

Founded in 1993, the European Union is a supranational political and economic union that holds immense diplomatic significance on international bodies such as the UN. Nowadays, the EU is a major player in both domestic and international affairs and its stance on international issues has a significant bearing on the rest of the world. While the EU is not an organ under the UN, the two international bodies work closely to ensure peace and stability within Europe.

As an intermediate council, we expect delegates to arrive with sufficient research. Please come prepared with a 60-second opening speech and an optional 90-second GSL speech for each topic respectively. Device usage during committee sessions will not be permitted outside of resolution debate. On a final note, AI usage before or during RENMUN will not be permitted and will result in disqualification from awards. With that being said, we can't wait to meet you all this coming March. Happy prepping!

Best regards,

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Topic Introduction

The issue of North Macedonia's accession is a continuous issue rooted in historical and cultural contexts that has only enhanced tensions in the Balkan region. Since the Yugoslav Wars and North Macedonia's subsequent independence, the sentiment of joining the Union has been on the rise. North Macedonia has become a candidate country for over two decades, with historical implications presenting themselves as roadblocks along the way.

Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia at the end of the 20th century, many former Yugoslav Republics (FYRs) applied to join the EU amidst rising tensions and global polarization with Russia. The then Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) submitted its membership application in 2004 and was granted candidate status a year later. Negotiations with the European Commission began shortly after but were stopped due to a veto by EU member Greece lasting fifteen years, then another two-year veto by Bulgaria regarding minority rights. It can be argued that North Macedonia has been the scapegoat of the Balkans regarding accession, yet its accession has seen stalls in time taken and progress.

Both vetoes have been lifted by both Greece and Bulgaria; yet, Albania's decoupling of the joint North Macedonia-Albania EU membership bid has once again charted the future of North Macedonia into uncertain waters, not only complicating domestic security but regional stability. Successful accession will depend on how North Macedonia executes reforms and adheres to European Union requirements.

Key Terms

Term	Definition
Accession	The process in which a country joins the European Union, involving being a candidate country, undertaking accession negotiations and becoming a full member
Coupling/Decoupling	Coupling refers to a kind of "package deal" in which two countries negotiate joining the EU together; decoupling refers to both countries pursuing individual negotiation agreements.
Veto	A right to reject a decision made by a lawmaking body. Within the context of the European Union, this refers to the ability to deny processes and decisions made within such

	governance bodies
Constitutional Amendment	A formal change to the text of a constitution, involving either adding/removing/modifying terms, voted on by the public.
Euroscepticism	Euroscepticism is a political position characterized by criticism, skepticism, or outright opposition to the European Union. It stems from concerns regarding national sovereignty, bureaucracy, and economic policies. It ranges from seeking reform to seeking withdrawal from the Union as a whole.
Democratic Backsliding	This refers to the gradual decline in democratic institutions and qualities of a state, often orchestrated by a democratic leader.
Western Balkans	The Western Balkans is a political term for six Southeast European nations not yet in the EU that are undergoing integration, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

Background Information

The Bulgarian minority in North Macedonia

North Macedonia has consistently failed to recognize and give adequate judicial support and rights to the Bulgarian minority, such as constitutional recognition - one of the conditions mentioned by Bulgaria to lift their veto which was lacklusterly executed. The European Commission has also stated their support for North Macedonian domestic reform and stressed the importance of doing so before accession happens.

However, conservatives in North Macedonia argue that EU accession should not be affected by bilateral disputes. They find Bulgaria's arguments superficial and unjustified, believing that support and integration relies on the majority of Macedonian people to be able to happen. North Macedonia generally believes that the EU's hyperfixation on ethnic minorities is an attempt to rewrite their history and quell nationalist Macedonian sentiment. As a result, this strains already stressed relations between the two neighbors, potentially resulting in another veto and subsequent delay to accession.

A coordinated EU response and perspective towards accession

A major flaw regarding the European Union is that a unified perspective is extremely difficult to coordinate. This can be seen in the EU stance towards Israel, in which countries such as Spain and France have actively called for a ceasefire and condemned Israeli atrocities whereas Germany and Poland have continued to support the rights of Israeli statehood and self defence.

Contextualizing a coordinated EU response into the topic however, accession has been a contentious issue for the Union. This is due to Euroscepticism in countries such as Hungary and France, where more robust accession requirements have been called for on top of the existing rigorous 35-chapter programme in place. Furthermore, nationalist and right-wing movements in member states have led to concerns over a supposed “loss” of sovereignty attributed to freedom of movement and “immigrants fighting for jobs.” As North Macedonia has been categorized as a developing country, there exists anti-Macedonian accession sentiment coupled with fears of sovereignty loss, although not widespread, across Europe.

On the other hand, countries such as Poland have consistently advocated for accession as a means to beat enlargement fatigue (The most recent example of accession to the EU was Croatia 12 years ago) and combat increasingly hostile Russian influence. Enlargement signifies the rise of a more united European community ready to counter Russian aggression - with North Macedonia being another key piece of the EU’s intricate puzzle to spread democratic ideals. A coordinated response is then needed not only for the future of candidate countries but for the future of the Union itself.

Regional perception of inequality regarding fast-tracking

Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Ukraine’s EU membership has been fast-tracked, reflecting the EU’s desire to support threatened countries and to strengthen its geopolitical stance against Russia. In stark contrast, North Macedonia has faced a twenty-year and ongoing accession process, with minority and naming disputes as well as getting decoupled from a bid. This leads to frustration amongst Macedonian citizens who feel their aspirations are overlooked. The EU argues that unique circumstances constitute a different approach and is necessary for continent-wide stability and security

The Balkan perspective is that the expedited process is unfair, arguing that the Peninsula’s common efforts to reach member state status should be recognized. The common sentiment is that the EU is prioritizing geopolitical interests over established protocols, which in turn undermines the legitimacy of the whole process. The perception of a “queue-cutting” approach exacerbates existing nationalist and Eurosceptic views towards EU integration. Continuous waiting and delays may only be leveraged by political factions to challenge existing governments or EU policies,

leading to domestic political instability that has the potential to negatively affect the entirety of Europe.

Potential Clashes

Veto power within accession negotiations

On paper, the EU has consistently advocated for a merit-based enlargement policy, in that if a member has adequately fulfilled all criteria, they should ideally be able to move on to the next step of accession negotiations. In this view, the Commission's progress reports, screening processes, and negotiation chapters create a predictable ladder in that reforms and alignment with the acquis lead to concrete rewards such as opening chapters, closing them, and ultimately accession.

However in reality, every decisive step of enlargement requires unanimous approval by the member states. This gives each government an effective veto over the entire process, allowing national priorities and domestic political calculations to intervene, even when they are only loosely connected or not connected at all to the candidate's actual performance on EU criteria. This has been seen through instances such as Cyprus blocking Turkish accession and Hungary's continuous vetoes, yet in the instance of North Macedonia, despite being recommended by the Commission for opening accession talks for years, its progress was blocked first for reasons tied to broader "methodological" debates and later by Bulgaria over bilateral historical and identity disputes. For North Macedonia, the message is that fulfilling technical conditions is not enough, in that success depends on the shifting political mood in key capitals, which undermines trust in the fairness and predictability of EU conditionality.

The North Macedonian constitution

The current framework links progress in negotiations to specific constitutional amendments in North Macedonia, especially the inclusion of Bulgarians as a recognized minority in the constitution. From the EU and Bulgaria's perspective, this is framed as a legal guarantee against discrimination and a confidence-building measure that anchors minority protections in the country's supreme law, to the point where Bulgaria has used their veto regarding issues such as minority recognition.

However from a domestic perspective, Macedonians believe constitutional change is a sovereign, foundational decision that should be guided by broad democratic consensus, not external pressure. Many Macedonian actors argue that amending the constitution under an explicit external ultimatum undermines the perceived legitimacy of the document and of the political forces that push the change through. Having already given major concessions to its accession journey, especially the name

change of their country, feeds a widespread fear that compromises will lead to more concessions being made without any irreversible payoff.

When EU leverage is seen as forcing changes that lack deep social support, it proliferates the rise of nationalism and Euroscepticism, making reforms appear externally imposed rather than domestically owned. Member states must consider the implications of such attrition measures and consider the benefits and detriments of policies to bolster North Macedonian cohesion and mutual understanding with regards to accession towards the EU.

Anti-immigration sentiment

Joining the EU means gaining access to the EU Single Market, adopting the Euro (for the most part), and most importantly, the freedom of movement of capital and labor between member states.

Member states such as France and the Netherlands have pushed a more restrictive approach to enlargement. France vetoed the opening of talks with North Macedonia and Albania in October 2019, arguing the procedure was flawed and that the Union needed internal reform and stronger conditionality before taking in new members. In some countries, there exists some nationalist backlash fighting against a “loss” of sovereignty, mainly induced by the shortage of job opportunities in the Union with the free movement rule exhibited by Bulgaria and Romania’s accession towards the European Union in 2007. To an extent, these groups are concerned the influx of relatively underdeveloped countries in the Union will lead to the undermining of the EU’s role as the Liberal International Order.

On the other hand, a group including Germany, many Central-Eastern and Baltic states, and EU institutions like the Commission and Parliament, has repeatedly argued that North Macedonia met the criteria to start talks and that further delay damages EU credibility in the Western Balkans. These states see enlargement as a strategic tool and were frustrated that political hesitations in Western European nations overruled positive Commission assessments and Parliament resolutions.

Key Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Involvement with the Issue
North Macedonia	Being at the forefront of the topic at hand, North Macedonia must navigate domestic issues before completely entering accession procedures, particularly its Rule of Law crisis as

	stipulated by the European Union's accession requirements. North Macedonia has also historically lagged behind with its Western Balkan counterparts However, as aforementioned, foreign interference in the Western Balkans may be a good way for North Macedonia to speed up accession while simultaneously solving any outstanding conflicts.
Bulgaria	Ethnic tensions and the non-recognition of Macedonian people and language as a separate entity have continued to fuel anti-accession sentiment in Bulgaria; they can then either 1. Remove and resolve any outstanding conflicts with North Macedonia 2. Prolong their accession process until all reforms go in Sofia's best interest It is worthy to note that Bulgaria and North Macedonia have had a sort of on-and-off historic friendship; how Bulgaria acts will define the Western Balkans' and Turkey's future in the European Union.
Hungary	Under Viktor Orban's leadership, Hungary has become one of the most Eurosceptic countries within the European Union itself. Hungary was the final member to approve Sweden's accession to NATO citing security concerns, whereas it has also been extremely vocal in banning Ukrainian accession to the European Union. Hungary has been commented to not be pro-EU or Russia, but "pro-Hungary". With the country's position within the Union being extremely volatile, it is noteworthy to understand that Hungary positions itself as a strong advocator for Western Balkan integration to the European Union and has long advocated for North Macedonian accession, citing that its accession is crucial for EU competitiveness and stability.
France	The 2022 French-brokered agreement was

	designed to unblock North Macedonia's EU accession talks by integrating sensitive historical and cultural issues directly into the formal administrative and political requirements of the European Union negotiating framework. This was a deliberate attempt to manage deep-seated, decades-old disputes between Sofia and Skopje not as abstract historical arguments, but as concrete, monitorable benchmarks within the condition-based EU integration process. The core of this approach was the requirement for North Macedonia to amend its constitution to recognize the Bulgarian minority, and to utilize existing bilateral protocols and a joint historical commission to address matters of historical interpretation, joint celebrations of national heroes, and "hate speech." Proponents saw this as a necessary, albeit difficult, path forward that provided an actionable framework for progress. However, this very structure has led to the current political stalemate and the criticism that the agreement was merely a "bureaucratic" solution that failed to achieve genuine historical reconciliation. North Macedonia's current government has firmly blocked the required constitutional changes, arguing that the French proposal unfairly makes the country's EU future contingent on satisfying Bulgarian demands that they perceive as an attack on their national identity. The European Union and its member states, including France, maintain that the agreement is an accepted, established consensus that is not subject to renegotiation. The result is a continuing deadlock that has placed the responsibility for overcoming the historical and cultural issues squarely on North Macedonia's shoulders, leaving the ultimate success or failure of the French initiative a point of intense and ongoing debate.

Possible Solutions

Re-evaluation of the European Union's Growth Plan

The EU's new Growth Plan for the Western Balkans is designed to front-load economic integration and convergence, conditional on reforms and alignment with EU rules. Re-evaluating such funding mechanisms may be able to further incentivize countries beyond North Macedonia to implement reforms within its public sector. For example, the EU can prioritise North Macedonia in disbursements from the Reform and Growth Facility if it delivers on public administration and single-market alignment benchmarks regardless of current political deadlocks. This would give citizens visible benefits, bolstering the concept of EU accession and relieving civilian doubt that joining the EU may not be the best idea. In evaluating the current state of accession, EU institutions could then point not only to the stalled formal negotiations but also to measurable economic and regulatory convergence driven by such mechanisms.

However, some with more populist governments may argue that expenditure outside the EU does no good internally, and may lead to distrust amongst current EU member states that the Union's priority as a whole is placed outside their own citizens. Hence, a more suitable solution on this end of the spectrum may be to reevaluate existing mechanisms for support in accession processes, changing the means of assistance from financial to technical, thereby bolstering the rule of law in North Macedonia and allowing for existing political disputes to be resolved.

Changing accession criteria for candidate countries

The EU has not admitted a new member state into its network since Croatia in 2013, one reason being partly that governments of individual countries and the Union as a whole has become more sensitive about accession requirements as a whole. With 35 thematic chapters needing to be fulfilled at an extremely high standard before actually negotiating the terms and conditions of accession itself, such requirements often disincentivize countries from proceeding, and has seen countries such as Turkey keep their candidate status since the last century. Solutions may manifest in changing such criteria to boost integration and effective compliance or confidence-building mechanisms while still keeping standards for regulation and oversight intact.

Timeline

Sep 1991	Yugoslavia is broken up into seven states, with North Macedonia declaring independence and forming itself as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Apr 1993	Macedonia joins the United Nations under the provisional name 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' (FYROM) due to a naming dispute with neighboring Greece
Jan-Aug 2001	The Macedonian insurgency of 2001 breaks out between Albanian insurgents and government forces; The Ohrid Framework is signed in August to improve the rights of ethnic Albanians and stabilize the country
Dec 2005	North Macedonia is granted Candidate status by the European Union, meaning that it can enter accession negotiations and start fulfilling requirements to join the Union
Dec 2009	Visa-free travel within the EU's Schengen Zone comes into effect for Macedonian citizens, enhancing the country's ties with the Union and bolstering cross-border agreement and communication.
Jun 2018	The Prespa Agreement is signed, changing the FYROM's name to North Macedonia and ending a long-standing name dispute with Greece
Mar 2019	North Macedonia becomes NATO's 30th member, solidifying accession to Western institutions and creating a basis for its further accession into European Union institutions such as the Single Market.
Nov 2020	Bulgaria issues a veto and blocks accession talks between the European Union and North Macedonia over North Macedonia's alleged lack of recognition of the Bulgarian minority. This hinders North Macedonia's progress in joining

	the Union, as domestic reforms must be made before the veto is lifted.
Jun 2022	Through a proposal brokered by France, Bulgaria officially lifts their veto on North Macedonia's accession and ratifies the *Treaty of Good Friendship and Neighborhood*. North Macedonia begins accession talks with the European Union
Sep 2024	The EU announces the decoupling of North Macedonia and Albania's membership bid due to disputes regarding the Bulgarian minority in North Macedonia. The EU then proceeds to open accession negotiations with Albania.

Guiding Questions

- Is my delegation in favor or against North Macedonian accession/accession to the European union as a whole?
- How has my delegation supported previous countries to accede to the European Union
- What mechanisms have failed candidate countries and why?
- If my delegation is not as geographically relevant, what role does my country play in supporting North Macedonia as a whole?
- If my delegation is against North Macedonian accession, what are the root causes of this belief and how can I justify such assertions?

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