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## **NORTHERN MACEDONIA OPTIMISTIC ABOUT JOINING THE EU IN 2025**

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Brussel Times (1 July 2018)

The European Council also endorsed the conclusions on enlargement and stabilisation and association process adopted by the General Affairs Council on 26 June 2018 when it responded positively to the progress made by Albania and Macedonia.

The Council sets out the path towards opening the accession negotiations in June 2019, depending on further progress to be monitored by the Commission. It took also note of the intention of the Commission to begin necessary preparatory work ahead of the opening of the negotiations.

A Commission spokesperson told the Brussels Times that this concerns future negotiating frameworks and the screening of acquis chapters.

At a joint press conference in Brussels on 28 June, European Council president Donald Tusk and Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev expressed satisfaction with the decision and described it as a great achievement.

This has been a good week for all of us, said Tusk and praised Macedonia's recent agreements with both Greece and Bulgaria as setting a strong example for others in the region to strengthen good neighbourly relations.

If Zaev was disappointed for having to wait another year for the formal start of accession negotiations, he did not show it during the press conference but he did not take any questions. Only one year has passed since his government turned around the course of his country and resumed the reform progress. He interpreted the decision as a promise to start negotiations next year.

Experience shows that it takes on average 7 years or more from the start of negotiations to EU membership, he said, which implies that we should become an EU member in 2025 as envisaged in the Commission's strategy for Western Balkans. Membership will stimulate Macedonia's economic development and mean great benefits for its citizens.

<http://www.brusselstimes.com/eu-affairs/11794/northern-macedonia-optimistic-about-joining-the-eu-in-2025>