Sir Peter FRY (United Kingdom) (Rapporteur of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights). - The Republic of Macedonia is a newly independent state which, from its birth, has been subjected to continuous difficulties and external pressures. These have been clearly outlined by our colleague Mrs Lentz-Cornette.

There are however some important reasons why this accession should go ahead. First, the Macedonian authorities have shown to all who have visited the country from the Council of Europe that there is the strongest possible will to implement the changes that are required. The last election result, which gave a strong parliamentary majority to the present government coalition, will make these changes possible much more quickly than was the case previously.

Secondly, the committee has agreed that a number of conditions should be placed on this accession, and this is the reason behind all of the amendments bar one that stand in my name. Some of these conditions have been met or will be met in the coming year. The leader of the Macedonian Government delegation has accepted the amendments on behalf of his parliament. I am satisfied that they have every intention of meeting the terms of these conditions.

Thirdly, what is needed is not so much a change in the wording of laws but a cultural change to allow many Macedonians to take advantage of the new freedoms that are available to them. To quote from the report to the Bureau from the jurists, Sir John Freeland and Mr Jörundsson, "Much work needs to be done immediately, to inform individuals of their rights and the possibility of seeking to enforce these before the court. Confidence in the administration of justice and a readiness to utilise remedies needs to take root."

In other words, the letter of the law alone is not enough to safeguard liberties. They must be exercised. Such a change will not happen overnight, but we must ask whether the people of Macedonia - they are the ones who are important - will be assisted by their country becoming a full member of the Council of Europe. I have no doubt that the advice and technical assistance that the Council can give clearly indicate that membership will be of advantage to Europe as a whole and to the Macedonians in particular.

I would like to devote some time to the question of minority rights. There are a number of ethnic minorities in Macedonia and our observations were that, for the most part, the situation was satisfactory and that a mechanism for dealing with these issues was being established and would be perfected.

By far the biggest minority is that of the Albanians, who amount to at least 23% of the total population, and perhaps more. Inevitably and increasingly there are demands that more be done to recognise their status within the country as a whole. That is reflected in both the legal and educational fields. In legal matters, it is clear that considerable confidence-building measures are still needed. It is not that the means of redress for complaints of ethnic discrimination do not exist, but that those who feel aggrieved have more faith in political action than in the legal processes available. This situation will not be easily resolved but that should not be a reason to oppose the accession. It aids the case for advice and help to be given by the Council of Europe and places a great responsibility on the Macedonian authorities.
The other area where problems exist is education. There is a need to develop a sense of a national identity for all Macedonians, regardless of their ethnic origin, and to encourage loyalty to the country. There is also a need to establish an opportunity for all citizens to take a full part in national life while retaining and developing their own ethnic identities.

In conclusion, no one pretends the situation in relation to legal affairs and human rights is perfect, but the Macedonian authorities are determined to move in the right direction. That means that the recently developed monitoring arrangements devised by the Council will become more important in relation to Macedonia.

Macedonia should be admitted tonight. Any reservations or outstanding problems can be tackled by the regular and thorough monitoring of progress towards the highest standards. I am convinced that the aims of the Council of Europe - the defence of human rights and the encouragement of parliamentary democracy - will be best served by admitting Macedonia and will also give assistance and encouragement to its people.