
ALBANIAN LEADERS SET TO SEAL JUDICIAL REFORM DEAL

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Albania's quarreling political parties have agreed on a compromise draft that opens the way for a vote on Thursday in parliament on judicial reform.

After months of debate and a week of tense recrimination, the EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement, Johannes Hahn, has brought about agreement on the points that were bitterly disputed.

On Wednesday, Hahn held telephone conversations with the Socialist Prime Minister, Edi Rama, with opposition Democratic Party, PD, leader, Lulzim Basha, and with the chairman of Parliament, Ilir Meta, over a draft that was presented to bring all parties into line.

In the draft, Hahn proposed that the international experts due to join the so-called International Monitoring Operation, IMO, will have a legal basis in Albania's constitution.

They will have the right to make recommendations during the process of screening candidates for high office in Albania's judicial system - but these will be not legally binding and they must give the reasoning for their recommendations based on Albanian law.

The role of the IMO experts has been hotly debated after the opposition rejected an initial proposal made by the EU and US and delivered by the Assistant Secretary of State, Victoria Nuland, seeking an active role for this body in the screening process.

The final proposal on which all parties have agreed balances the role of international experts in the Albanian judicial appointments system, putting them into the constitution at the same time as not making their recommendations compulsory.

Prime Minister Rama on Wednesday called the new consensus on judicial reform a historic event.

"Together we are going to push forward this historic reform that opens the way to a revolution in the justice system and overthrows those.... who want to take the justice system in this country hostage," he said.

Opposition leader Basha said their battle to improve the draft had been won.

"Our battle brought us victory, not for me or the PD, but for all Albanians, starting from the Prime Minister to every citizen, equal in front of the law," he said.

Hahn hailed Basha's pledge to agree to the proposal on Twitter.

"Welcome encouraging news from Lulzim Basha and PD to vote for the justice reform tomorrow. This agreement shows leadership and responsibility for Albania on its EU path," Hahn wrote.

The agreement opens the way for Albania to potentially open accession negotiations with the EU by the end of this year.

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<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/albania-politics-agree-on-judicial-reform-07-20-2016#sthash.fSx9sKZw.dpuf>

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