
ALBANIA MPS FINALLY ADOPT JUDICIAL REFORM

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Albania's parliament early on Friday adopted long-awaited judicial reforms, after 18 months of technical and political work and days of tense negotiations.

All 140 members of parliament voted in favour of the reform, after negotiations between the three main political leaders led by US ambassador Donald Lu and EU head of delegation Romana Vlahutin on Thursday closed the last remaining disputes over various articles.

The judicial package, which is considered crucial for the fight against corruption and political influence, amended 58 articles of the constitution and passed several laws creating new justice institutions.

The reform was hailed by party leaders as marking a new beginning that will also open the way towards closer ties to the European Union.

"The reform will remove from the justice system all the corrupt judges and prosecutors ... The vote will open the road for the much-awaited revolution in the country's justice," Prime Minister, Edi Rama said.

The leader of the opposition Democratic Party, Lulzim Basha, called the vote "a victory for all Albanians" that will open up a new chapter in the country's life.

US ambassador Lu congratulated Albanians and the parliament on "finding a consensus under incredibly severe pressure."

"The United States is proud to have supported the drafting and negotiation of this strong reform package and we look forward to continuing our enduring partnership, which is now much stronger," he stated.

EU High Representative Federica Mogherini and EU Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn in a joint statement hailed "an unprecedented step addressing a longstanding request by the overwhelming majority of the citizens.

"It is also a major contribution to the fight against corruption and organised crime. These are all key priorities for Albania on its path towards integration into the EU," the statement read.

Albania next month expects a positive recommendation from the European Commission concerning its request to open accession talks with EU by the end of the year.

In order to make parties accept the draft, senior representatives of Western countries issued tough messages about the need for the reform and even took part in the negotiations themselves.

The US Assistant secretary of State, Victoria Nuland, in July brought to the table a compromise proposal that served as a basis for consensus over the disputes that the parties had over the draft.

Commissioner Hahn was also directly worked with party leaders to find a consensus over the reform.

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<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/albanian-parliament-passes-with-unanimity-the-judicial-reform-07-22-2016#sthash.QhMawfPU.dpuf>

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