
MACEDONIA PARLIAMENT DISSOLVES FOR EARLY ELECTIONS

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The dissolution of parliament on Monday ended several days of uncertainty about whether the country would be able to stick to the legal deadlines for the December 11 early elections that were agreed this summer at EU-sponsored talks between Macedonias warring politicians.

A total of 110 out of 123 MPs from both the ruling and opposition party voted in favour of the dissolution. The vote was followed by loud applause from the MPs.

The dissolution was preceded by a vote for the national budget for 2017 after only two hours of debate.

The budget was only backed by the ruling party legislators, but the opposition decided not to prolong the budget debate in order to speed up the dissolution.

Earlier on Monday, the opposition proposed draft law changes which were aimed at aiding the work of the Special Prosecution, SJO, which is tasked with investigating high-level crime.

However ruling party MPs, for the second time in just two weeks, did not give their backing to the changes which would have prolonged the work of the SJO and allowed for better witness protection.

Originally parliament was set to dissolve last Wednesday, exactly two months before the election date.

But uncertainty arose after the opposition and the ruling VMRO DPMNE party accused each other of deliberately keeping the parliament working because they were afraid of the elections.

On Friday, visiting EU Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn urged both sides to take action to maintain the agreed election date.

The elections, which come after two postponements of the date earlier this year, are intended to pave a way out of Macedonia's long-running political crisis.

The political crisis revolves around opposition claims that the government engaged in illegal mass wiretapping operations.

In February 2015, the opposition started releasing batches of covertly recorded tapes, which it said showed that the VMRO DPMNE-led government had been behind the illegal surveillance of

some 20,000 people, including ministers.

It also said the tapes proved many criminal allegations against government members, including election-rigging.

VMRO DPMNE leader Nikola Gruevski, who was prime minister from 2006 until he resigned earlier this year under an EU-brokered deal, has insisted that the tapes were fabricated by unnamed foreign intelligence services and given to the opposition to destabilise the country.

Sinisa Jakov Marusic BIRN Skopje

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