
CRISIS DRAGS ON AS MACEDONIA FAILS TO FORM GOVERNMENT

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Macedonias president on Monday (30 January) resumed the search for a new prime minister after the former premier failed to form a government, despite his partys narrow election victory.

The December vote was held as part of a European Union-brokered deal between Macedonias four main political parties aimed at ending a long-running political crisis.

President Gjorge Ivanov was informed by parliament that the VMRO-DPMNE party led by Nikola Gruevski, the former premier and a veteran conservative leader, had failed to form a government within the 20-day deadline, his office said.

A source in the office told AFP that Ivanov would restart consultations.

In the vote, VMRO-DPMNE secured 51 seats in the 120-seat parliament, or two more than the Social Democrats (SDSM), the main opposition party.

The neck-and-neck results meant that ethnic Albanian parties, with 20 seats between them, emerged as kingmakers, but Gruevski was unable to negotiate a deal.

The three main ethnic parties are demanding that Albanian be made an official language.

Ivanov may now ask the Social Democrats to try to form a government, or he could seek to form a broader coalition, according to analysts.

SDSM leader Zoran Zaev said he was expecting Ivanov to give him the mandate, saying the president would be breaking the constitution if he did not, while VMRO-DPMNE said new elections were the only mature solution.

European Commission spokeswoman Maja Kocijancic urged the president to swiftly give the task to a leader capable of forming a stable, solid and accountable coalition.

Speaking in Brussels, she told reporters the coalition should be as broad as possible with a strong reformist consensus and inter-ethnic cooperation.

Macedonias political crisis emerged after a mass wiretapping scandal erupted in February 2015, inciting huge street protests both for and against the government.

The scandal led Gruevski to step down in January 2016 after nearly 10 years in power, clearing the way for new elections.

Macedonia wants to join both NATO and the EU, but its membership has been blocked by Athens over a dispute about the countrys name — a northern region of Greece is also called Macedonia.

Ethnic Albanians make up about a quarter of Macedonias two million people.

By EurActiv.com with AFP

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