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## **ALBANIA OPPOSITION DELAYS LAUNCH OF JUDICIAL REFORM**

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Albania's opposition boycott of parliament has delayed the launch of justice reform despite warnings from the European Union that such a move would hamper the country from launching full membership negotiations with the bloc.

The Democratic Party on Monday boycotted an extraordinary parliamentary session intended to be the first step before creating the vetting bodies to evaluate the personal and professional backgrounds of some 800 judges and prosecutors.

The opposition would have three out of six committee members.

The parliament postponed the session, asking the people's advocate, who collected the applications for the vetting bodies, for a week to reconsider applicants.

The justice system reform that was approved unanimously last year, is intended to ensure that judges and prosecutors are independent from politics, and to root out bribery. Judicial corruption has plagued post-communist Albania, hampering its democratic processes.

EU and U.S. experts were involved in drafting the judicial reform.

For more than two weeks, opposition Democrats have blocked the main boulevard in the capital, Tirana, calling for a caretaker government to take the country to the June 18 parliamentary elections.

It is not clear when the parliament will convene again on this issue, as the opposition has made it clear its boycott is definite.

Last week EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini told the opposition that its boycott was hampering the country's ability to integrate with the bloc and therefore join the EU.

Mogherini said that reforming the justice system and holding free elections were two steps needed to convince EU members to launch full membership negotiations with the country.

<http://www.voanews.com/a/albania-opposition-delays-launch-of-judicial-refrom/3752548.html>

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