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## **MACEDONIA OPPOSITION MPS TO RETURN FOR NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE**

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Macedonia's main opposition right-wing VMRO DPMNE party is to end its boycott of parliament next Tuesday for a vote of no-confidence in the Social Democrat-led government of Zoran Zaev.

The motion is unlikely to pass as the opposition lacks the minimum of 61 MPs needed in the 120-seat parliament to bring down the government.

But VMRO DPMNE leader Hristijan Mickovski said that Zaev's government, which has had ten months in power, had lost all credibility.

Its defeats have become commonplace and bare populism is its trademark. In reality, the people live much worse [than before], Mickovski said.

This criminal government will be remembered as the most incompetent since Macedonia's independence, he added.

VMRO DPMNE MPs stopped attending parliament in November after police arrested six of their MPs who were suspected of playing roles in the April 27 2017 mob attack on parliament.

Five MPs are now among 30 people facing terrorism charges for what the prosecution claims was an organized attempt to destabilize the country.

The return of the opposition MPs comes at an important time, when parliament has only about ten days to pass several key EU-sought reforms that need opposition MPs' votes.

Macedonia hopes the European Commission will restore its frozen invitation to start EU accession talks after its latest progress report is published on April 17.

Before then, however, parliament needs to pass a set of prepared bills, mostly on EU-sought reforms in the judiciary, and which need a two-thirds majority to pass.

Only the votes of the opposition MPs can provide that.

For the past two years, the EU has frozen its invitation for Macedonia to start membership talks due to an ongoing political crisis, which was only resolved last year with the fall of the VMRO DPMNE-led government of Nikola Gruevski.

Despite his savage criticism of the government, Mickovski hinted that his MPs would participate in

the debate on the reform bills, scheduled to start on Wednesday, after the no-confidence motion.

He said that joint working groups with the ruling parties had already discussed and aligned their stances on several of the key reform bills.

A senior VMRO DPMNE official on Thursday told BIRN under condition of anonymity that the party's MPs would participate in the vote for the reform bills, but only after the no-confidence vote takes place.

He declined to comment on speculation that his party had come under Western pressure to return to parliament, and that the no-confidence motion was just an excuse to do this.

We disagree with the government, but we also have a responsibility to the countrys European perspective, he commented.

Prime Minister Zaev said he welcomed the oppositions expected return to parliament and that dialogue with the opposition was moving in a good direction.

The no-confidence motion was a legitimate move that should not jeopardize the countrys EU-related priorities, he added.

The working groups [between the opposition and government] are at work and a large number of the bills are already aligned. The expectations are that we will pass these bills by April 17, he told the media on Tuesday.

The first bills that will be voted on, possibly on Wednesday, are the new Law on the Judiciary and on the work of the Judicial Council that should lay the ground for further reform in this sector.

Brussels has marked the judiciary as a weak link in Macedonias system that needs urgent reform to conduct a more efficient fight against crime and corruption.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/government-no-confidence-brings-back-macedonia-opposition-to-parliament-04-05-2018>

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