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## **NETHERLANDS TO VETO THE OPENING OF ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS WITH ALBANIA**

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The Dutch parliament has blocked yesterday (21 June) the opening of EU accession negotiations with Albania. The EU summit on 28-29 June will decide whether to open negotiations with Macedonia and Albania.

All decision concerning the EU accession process are decided at the EU level with unanimity, which means that any member country can block the process. The EU summit is expected to decide opening negotiations with Macedonia, after the country solved its long-standing name dispute with Greece.

However opening of negotiations with Albania is unlikely, after a large majority in the Dutch parliament prohibited such move by the government. According to the daily De Telegraaf, the parliamentary factions of Mark Ruttes VVD, but the parties supporting his government, namely CDA, CU, PVV, SP and 50Plus blocked the door to Albania, over serious concerns about combating corruption. These parties represent 76 MPs out of a total of 150.

Only D66 and GroenLinks want the EU to start talks with Albania and Macedonia about accession. These forces represent a total of 33 MPs. They believe that countries will take good care of their rule of law, approach to crime and the fight against corruption if they have a clear prospect of accession. But negotiating does not mean that they can join, said MP Kees Verhoeven of D66.

CDA MEP Martijn Van Helvert is quoted as saying that the Netherlands recognises the increasing influence of Russia and China on the Western Balkans. But he adds this is not a reason for compromising over the criteria of accession.

Yes, there is progress in Albania, for example, in reforming the judiciary. Judges are, for example, screened. But of the 800 judges only ten have been tested. Then you cannot say: the country is ready for negotiations on accession, Van Helvert said.

In 2017, Prime Minister Edi Rama launched a series of reforms meant to pave the way towards EU membership. The country has inserted an international monitoring operation in its constitution, made up of retired judges and prosecutors from EU member states, who are assisting their Albanian colleagues in vetting the countrys judges.

Albania justice minister: Next six months will be crucial for our EU bid

The member states are expected to vote next week on whether to open accession talks with Albania, as the Commission has recommended. The Balkan country has made progress in

improving the rule of law but its EU prospects remain vague as several EU capitals have called for caution in planning the blocs next enlargement.

Even regarding Macedonia, there is no certainty that the summit will take the decision to start accession negotiations, because Austria could block the decision. The country has ratified this agreement and has informed Greece about it on 19 June. According to the agreement, Greece must now send out a formal letter, saying that it approves the opening of EU accession talks and NATO membership for its neighbour.

Speaking to journalists yesterday, a EU diplomat was very cautious as to the results of the General Affairs Council, which will discuss this issue on Tuesday (26 June), and of the summit itself (28-29 June). He called the situation very dynamic.

However, he hinted that the climate wasnt hostile. If I compared it to sports games, it is rather basketball than rugby, he said.

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Kaynak/Source: