
MACEDONIA CELEBRATES NATO MEMBERSHIP OFFER

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16.07.2018

Balkan Insight (15 July 2018)

Government-organized concerts were held in 15 towns across the country, including the capital Skopje, where predominantly domestic bands and artists entertained the public.

Macedonia has a reason to celebrate. We are accomplishing our joint dreams and hopes, Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev told media as the events were kicking off.

Despite the overall celebratory mood, a group of activists protested against NATO at the Skopje concert.

The Western alliance formally extended an invitation for Macedonia to start accession talks on Wednesday, at the opening of the two-day NATO Summit in Brussels.

However, Macedonia will only take its place in NATO once all of the procedures about the recently agreed name deal with neighbouring Greece are implemented.

This includes changing the countrys name to the Republic of North Macedonia, after which the country will take its place in the Western alliance.

The fate of the name deal rests on the outcome of a referendum in Macedonia slated for early September or late October, when it must receive support from a majority of citizens.

While Prime Minister Zoran Zaev is optimistic that most people will support a deal that also unlocks the countrys stalled Euro-Atlantic integration bids, the countrys main opposition VMRO DPMNE party has called for an anti-government protest on Sunday.

The opposition strongly opposes the name agreement, deeming it a capitulation, but critics say it has not offered an alternative way for the country to achieve its strategic goals of joining NATO and EU.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-celebrates-nato-membership-offer-07-15-2018>

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