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## **MACEDONIA PM ACCUSES PRO-RUSSIAN FORCES OF PLANNING VIOLENCE**

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Balkan Insight (16 July 2018)

Greek businessmen allied with Russia are spending money on encouraging violence in Macedonia ahead of the referendum in autumn on the country's name and in order to prevent Macedonia from joining NATO, Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev told BuzzFeed News.

Zaev said his government had received reports that Greek businessmen who are sympathetic to the Russian cause have paid Macedonians sums ranging from \$13,000 to \$21,000 to commit acts of violence ahead of a crucial referendum later this year that will determine whether the Balkan state can join the military alliance.

Zaev did not name anyone but said the investigation into the matter was continuing.

He said that police had learned of the payments after detaining several participants in violent protests in front of parliament in June.

Macedonia last week got its long-awaited invitation to start membership talks for NATO, at the alliances summit in Brussels.

This was made possible after Macedonia and Greece signed their historic deal on June 17 after a series of UN-sponsored talks, ending their 27-year dispute over Macedonia's name.

Under the agreement, Macedonia will change its name to the Republic of North Macedonia in order to make it distinct from the northern Greek province, also called Macedonia.

In return, Greece lifted its long-standing blockade of its neighbours Euro-Atlantic accession bids.

But the key test for the government in Skopje is the referendum on the "name" deal, which is due to take place this autumn.

If the plebiscite succeeds, the agreement will be put into effect, more or less guaranteeing the success of the countrys accession to NATO and the start of EU accession talks.

The main opposition parties in Macedonia and in Greece oppose this agreement, however, calling it a betrayal of their respective national interests.

Zaev told BuzzFeed that during the NATO summit last week, he privately asked for help with the referendum from US President Donald Trump, who is meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/pm-pro-russian-businessmen-try-to-foil-macedonia-s-nato-acession-07-16-2018>

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