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**WEBER ATTACKS 'POPULIST' TSIPRAS, REMAINS SILENT OVER MACEDONIA NAME DEAL**

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Victory by Greece's right-wing New Democracy party over Alexis Tsipras's Syriza in the next elections would show that the rise of populists in Europe is not irreversible, European People's Party (EPP) Spitzenkandidat Manfred Weber has said.

However, Weber avoided once again making his position clear when it comes to the Macedonia name change deal, recently brokered between Athens and Skopje.

Speaking at the main opposition New Democracy conference on 15 December, Weber, who was given the nod as EPP lead candidate, or Spitzenkandidat, hit out at Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, calling him a populist.

Tsipras lied to the Greek people, who had to pay the bill for his government [actions], Weber said.

The Bavarian politician went further, accusing both Tsipras, who belongs to the European Left, and the socialist group of the European Parliament of opposing every trade deal.

Last week, they rejected the EU-Japan trade deal, which will create a lot of new jobs, Weber said.

We see the economic problems and political chaos in London. That's what happens when you follow the populists. It is much better to reform Europe where it is needed than to leave or even worse to destroy European unity, he said, drawing parallels with Brexit.

Referring to the migration issue, Weber said the EPP would address ongoing problems at the external borders.

The socialists ignore the problem and the populists across Europe only rely on hate and fear. Both have one thing in common: they don't know how to deal with illegal migration. For us it's clear: no one crosses the border without a passport in the future.

He added that in Europe, we share common roots and we must stick to our Christian and European values.

**Mitsotakis will be an excellent prime minister**

Weber praised New Democracy leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis, saying that if he comes to power he will be an excellent prime minister and create new jobs by attracting investments.

Mitsotakis has backed Webers candidature for the European Commission presidency since the very beginning.

Ive had the opportunity to work with Kyriakos Mitsotakis over the last few years. I believe in New Democracys programme and Mitsotakis has a strong voice in Europe, Weber noted.

He has earned the respect and admiration throughout our Union and everyone knows that when Kyriakos speaks he has Greek people in mind, he added.

New Democracy will push populists aside and will restore the credibility of this wonderful country. A New Democracy victory will be a clear signal that the rise of populism is not irreversible, Weber said.

### **Macedonia name deal: the hot potato**

However, Weber remains silent about the deal recently reached between Athens and Skopje to re-name the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) North Macedonia.

During his speech, he avoided making any reference to the issue despite the fact that the EPP, as a political group, has publicly supported the deal.

European Parliament Vice-President and Syriza MEP Dimitris Papadimoulis said while the EPP and other EU political groups, as well as the European Commission, are in favour of the deal, Weber does not make his position clear.

For months now, Mr Weber has remained silent over the issue. But with such an opportunistic behaviour, he will never be trusted by the European Parliament to succeed Mr Juncker, Papadimoulis told EURACTIV.com.

A vote on the name change deal in the Greek parliament is expected in January. But New Democracy has vowed to block the deal and has urged other parties to do the same.

### **EPPs Weber under pressure to break his silence over Macedonia name deal**

Manfred Weber, the European Peoples Party (EPP) Spitzenkandidat for the EU elections, has been silent over the name change deal reached this year between Athens and Skopje. The deal has been generally endorsed by the EPP but rejected by some of its members, including those from the two countries involved.

Speaking at the conference, Mitsotakis reiterated that his party would never approve such a deal.

Mr Tsipras, you did not save any Macedonia. All you have done is to give Macedonian ethnicity and language to our neighbours. You said yes where everyone else had the courage to say no, Mitsotakis said, adding that the vast majority of the Greek society opposes the deal.

Stop insulting the Macedonians and all the Greeks. Stop calling far-right and nationalist whoever disagrees with your policy, he added.

### **A lie has no legs**

The debate over the issue heated up last week when Mitsotakis hinted that the Greek government exchanged the Macedonia name deal with the annulation of pension cuts, a measure that was provided in the bailout programme.

Greek media reported that at a meeting with Tsipras last week, EU Commissioner Pierre Moscovici expressed his disappointment about this statement.

According to the Athens New Agency, the French politician said: If I am accused of helping reduce austerity in Greece, I am proud of it.

EURACTIV contacted Moscovici's office but no comment had been provided by the time of this article's publication.

Papadimoulis commented that both Weber and EU migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos, who also attended the conference, denied backing Mitsotakis' unacceptable slander.

First of all, they both know that this is an unacceptable lie. Moreover, in such a scenario, they should have condemned as accomplices in this exchange top EPP officials, such as Mr Juncker, Ms Merkel, Mr Tajani and Mr Tusk.

Unfortunately for Mitsotakis, a lie has no legs, Papadimoulis said.

### **Positions**

Speaking at the Doha Forum on 16 December, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres commented, The example of Greece and FYROM is a sample of a transnational effort to close outstanding issues that have caused nothing else than tensions; the deal will bring many benefits to the Balkan region.

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Kaynak/Source: