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STEVO PENDAROVSKI WINS NORTH MACEDONIA'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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Stevo Pendarovski, supported by the ruling Social Democrats (SDSM), has won the North Macedonian presidency in a run-off vote.

The 56-year-old garnered 51.66 percent of the vote in North Macedonia on Sunday, beating nationalist VMRO's Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova which got 44.73 percent. The remaining 3.61 percent of the votes were void.

Sunday's run-off poll was called after neither candidate received enough ballots for an outright win in the first round of voting two weeks ago.

The victory puts more wind into the sails of the ruling coalition, which expects to get a date to start European Union accession talks in June and become the 30th NATO member state next year.

"The victory of this concept brings a future for the republic of North Macedonia and it's our ticket to Europe," Pendarovski told reporters after the election results were announced.

Prime Minister Zoran Zaev congratulated Pendarovski and said: "As of today, no one can stand in the way of progress. We showed we are ready for Europe."

The campaign for the elections was dominated by divisions over a change to the country's name that was agreed to mollify Greece and open the way for EU and NATO membership.

Greece had, for decades, demanded that the ex-Yugoslav republic change its name from Macedonia, arguing that it implied a territorial claim on a northern Greek province also called Macedonia.

The new name was formally ratified earlier this year. But the accord continues to divide North Macedonians and has eclipsed all other campaign issues.

In contrast to Pendarovski, Siljanovska-Davkova, a university professor, opposes the name change, although she is also pro-European Union. She has accused the government of dragging its feet on economic reforms.

VMRO-DPMNE accused the government of "engineering election", adding it had information of the ruling coalition's bribing of voters and threatening them, among other things.

The president holds a largely ceremonial post in North Macedonia but he or she is the supreme commander of the armed forces and also signs off on parliamentary legislation.

The refusal of outgoing President Gjorge Ivanov, a nationalist, to sign some bills backed by parliament has delayed the implementation of key laws, including one on the wider use of the Albanian language.

But Ivanov had no authority to block the constitutional amendments passed earlier this year by a two-thirds majority of parliament that enabled the name change to North Macedonia.

Turnout on Sunday was 46.6 percent, above the 40 percent threshold needed for the election result to be valid but still low, which analysts attributed to voters' disappointment with a pace of reforms.

https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/05/stevo-pendarovski-wins-north-macedonia-presidential-election-190506000053076.html

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