
GERMANY DEALS BLOW TO ALBANIA, NORTH MACEDONIA EU HOPES

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The German parliament on Thursday approved the NATO accession protocol with North Macedonia □ but did not discuss supporting the launch of EU accession talks either with North Macedonia or Albania.

Without such a decision from the Bundestag, the German government cannot approve the opening of accession talks with the two aspiring member countries at the European Council later this month, in June 18.

This means that the earliest possible date for this to happen would be in September, after the Bundestag returns from its summer recess.

The stalling in Berlin will add to the concerns of the governments in Skopje and Tirana, who also have to deal with the enlargement skepticism of France, The Netherlands and some other EU countries.

Both countries had been hoping for a firm date to start membership talks.

North Macedonia Prime Minister Zoran Zaev earlier this week in Brussels warned that if no decision was made to start accession talks this year, it could jeopardize his pro-European government and boost the more euro-skeptic right-wing forces in the country who were ousted from power two years ago in 2017.

The EU will either support this progressive, pro-European option, or those who have been blocking these processes and who have been tagged as radical, nationalist or pro-Russian. The disappointment among our citizens if the EC fails to grant a positive opinion will give hope to the latter forces, Zaev said.

The European Commission in May recommended the EU to open membership talks with North Macedonia and Albania – but the left a decision on the actual date to the European Council in June.

Its report praised Zaevs government for striking a historic deal with Greece last summer on ending the long dispute over Macedonias name, as well as engaging in other reforms designed to unlock the countrys stalled Euro-Atlantic bid.

No matter what will happen, we did everything we could. I would like our [EU] partners to know that we have been waiting for 15 years [for a date] and that now, everything is possible, Zaev said.

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