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## **ALBANIA PM URGES EU TO DELIVER ON MEMBERSHIP PROMISE**

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Albania's prime minister Tuesday urged the EU to deliver on its promise to start membership talks with Tirana, as the head of the European Commission said a June deadline would likely be missed.

Edi Rama said that after delivering reforms demanded by Brussels, in particular on justice and the rule of law, Albania had earned the right to start accession negotiations and he demanded the EU stick to a commitment made a year ago.

"I think that it's time for Europe to do what we expect after having delivered -- to recognise our merit and to switch a green light for accession talks," Rama said after talks with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in Brussels.

EU member states agreed in June 2018 that Albania and North Macedonia should be able to start formal talks to join the bloc in June this year, providing they carried out certain reforms.

The commission, the bloc's executive arm, last month reported that both countries had fulfilled the requirements and should be allowed to start talks, but a number of countries -- notably France, Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands -- are reluctant.

For talks to start, all 28 existing members have to give their agreement.

After 13 years of trying to join the EU, Rama has warned that patience is wearing thin in Albania and he called on the bloc to recognise the country's place in Europe.

"I want to say very simply that the EU should act geostrategically, geopolitically and should act based on the merit of the countries. If the countries deserve it, the EU should not deny it."

Last week, North Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev warned that delaying the start of talks could topple his government and usher in nationalist, anti-EU forces.

Juncker, who has repeatedly given his backing to starting talks with the two countries, said it was not "mission impossible" to win round reluctant EU states, but poured cold water on hopes of getting approval this month.

"I'm not focusing on June because there are parliaments which have to approve, they are not in session in June so it could be later," he said.

"But my conviction is that we have to make it very crystal clear that the moment has come to open negotiations with Albania."

Overshadowing Rama's trip to Brussels was political drama at home, where his ruling socialist party said they would launch a process to oust President Ilir Meta after he moved to cancel local elections.

Rama refused to comment on the crisis but Juncker insisted the polls should go ahead.

"I'm in favour that these elections should take place. If not, this would harm the European perspective of Albania," Juncker said.

<https://www.france24.com/en/20190611-albania-pm-urges-eu-deliver-membership-promise>

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