
NORTH MACEDONIA MUST REFORM JUDICIARY BEFORE ACCESSION TALKS CAN START, HAHN SAYS

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North Macedonia needs to reform its judiciary to ensure it can handle high-level crime and corruption cases before the European Union can set a date to start accession talks, top EU official Johannes Hahn said on Thursday.

The former Yugoslav republic changed its name to North Macedonia this year, ending a more than two decade dispute with Greece over its name and removing an obstacle to its membership of the EU and NATO.

It expects the new EU Commission to set a date for accession talks in October.

Im confident that the decision [on the start of accession talks] will be taken in October, Hahn, EU commissioner for enlargement of the bloc, said after meeting Prime Minister Zoran Zaev.

North Macedonia has worked hard for it and now its time for EU leaders to deliver.

Hahn said the government in Skopje should implement reforms to ensure the judiciary is ready to complete cases handled so far by the special prosecutors office.

What is important now in view of the crucial decisions in October is to adopt the law on the public prosecutor which provides important guarantees for the rule of law, Hahn said.

The office of the special prosecutor was created under the 2015 agreement which ended a two-year political crisis in North Macedonia.

Its main task was to deal with high-level organized crime and corruption, cases that local institutions were not in a position to handle because they faced influence from politicians. The mandate of the office expired last September, but very few cases have been completed. Parliament is now expected to pass a law that would extend the mandate of the public prosecutor to cases handled by the office of the special prosecutor. Parliament is expected to vote on the draft law after the summer recess.

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