
ALBANIA BLAMES LIKELY ACCESSION TALKS 'NO' ON DIVIDED EU

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Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama has tried to counter criticism over the expected decision by the European Council on October 18 not to open EU membership negotiations with Tirana – claiming that any such decision will be the result of EU internal disagreements. It would not be related to the progress achieved by his country toward fulfilling the criteria, Rama maintained.

Speaking on a Facebook post, Rama told supporters on Tuesday that France was blocking the opening of negotiations because President Emanuel Macron was demanding that EU reform must precede further enlargement.

Emanuel Macron is not ready for a stronger push for the European integration of the Western Balkans without pushing first for the reformation of the Union, Rama said.

It is very important to understand that this is not an approach against Albania and North Macedonia, or against the perspective of the Western Balkans in general, Rama stressed.

EU ministers on Tuesday failed to agree on whether to start talks that could lead to Albania and North Macedonia joining the EU, mainly because France opposes any agreement until the entire accession process is reformed .

Rama insisted that the expected negative decision had nothing to do with the state of preparedness of Albania or the fulfillment of conditions by his government. This has nothing to do with what we have done or not done to deserve a yes, he said.

Acting Foreign Minister Gent Cakaj went further by posting a message in English on Twitter, saying the credibility of the EU was now in danger and warning about a boost for its strategic rivals in the Western Balkans.

We don't need a narrow, insular, inward-looking & disengaged EU but one that is open, fair & a beacon of hope in troubled times, Cakaj said.

Albania has remained in the waiting room to open negotiations since 2014, when it was granted candidate status for membership.

Last year, the European Council promised to open negotiations with Albania this year on condition

it made further progress in the fight against corruption and organised crime.

However, the German parliament – while endorsing a positive decision in late September – added a longer list of conditions for Albania, mostly related to the same issues of crime and corruption.

Meanwhile, North Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, who is in the same position as Rama, said that he did not object to further reforms within the EU but did not see why the enlargement process could not be run in parallel with this.

Member states must not forget why the EU was formed at all – for common interests, but also for Europe to be a leader in democracy and in all other fields, Zaev told the Southeast Europe Business Development Network event in Vienna.

We want to be a part of it. Sometimes I think that we, the candidate countries, believe more in European values than the EU member states themselves, he added.

Ahead of the EU meeting, Northern Macedonia President Stevo Pendarovski warned in an interview with Austrias Die Presse, that if accession talks with his country did not begin soon, the EU would lose all credibility and interest in it will fall.

Recalling that North Macedonia had changed its constitutional name in order to further its European integration, he said: Citizens have asked us why we needed to change the name of our country. We told them, so that we could become part of the EU. We have fulfilled everything.

Now citizens are asking why delay is coming again, the President underlined.

<https://balkaninsight.com/2019/10/16/albania-premier-blame-eu-for-possible-negative-decision-on-negotiations/>

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