
MACRON'S VETO UNDERMINES BALKAN STABILITY, GREEK MEP SAYS

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French President Emmanuel Macron's veto against the accession of North Macedonia to the EU will open the door to external influence in the Western Balkans region, according to Syriza MEP Stelios Kouloglou.

When Macron decided to exercise his veto, he took into consideration neither the political stability of the Western Balkans, the importance of external influence, nor the people of North Macedonia. He just played his game with Germany, Kouloglou said, speaking to North Macedonian television over the weekend.

I understand the frustration, but you have to wait, because I believe that the EU's position will change, he added. At the very least, we can achieve the decoupling of the candidacies of North Macedonia and Albania. Kouloglou's leftist Syriza party signed a name change agreement with North Macedonia's Prime Minister Zoran Zaev earlier this year.

On Sunday, North Macedonia's political leaders agreed to hold early elections in April, after the EU blocked the start of membership talks. We have reached a consensus for the elections to be held on 12 April 2020, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev said after the meeting of main political leaders with President Stevo Pendarovski.

Meanwhile, on Friday, EU leaders failed to agree on opening Skopje's accession negotiations, mostly because of opposition from France. Denmark and the Netherlands have also joined France's opposition. The issue is now put on hold until next spring.

Zaev has proposed a snap election as a result of the EU decision, which he called a historic mistake. Zaev will resign on 3 January and a technical government will be appointed.

Under the law, the prime minister must resign 100 days ahead of the polls, and a technical government that will include both the ruling coalition and the opposition is to be voted in by parliament.

However, the unanimous view of all parties is that Euro-Atlantic integration is our goal * and these aspirations of the country will remain, Zaev told reporters after the meeting.

Zaev and his Social Democrats came to power in 2017, ousting the right-wing party of former strongman Nikola Gruevski, who had dominated the country for a decade.

Since then, his government has poured all of its political capital into putting North Macedonia on

the path to NATO and EU membership.

EU-wide disappointment

The vast majority of EU countries have expressed their disappointment with Frances stance.

Roland Freudenstein, policy director of Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, the official think tank of the European Peoples Party (EPP), told EURACTIV.com last week that the stance of Macrons government isolated the country, adding to several recent setbacks of French European policy.

There is the problem of the Unions credibility in the Western Balkans as accession talks were promised at a political level, as well as the danger that these countries are being pushed into the open arms of Russia, China and Turkey if the EU doesnt show that it is serious about enlargement, he said, adding that Paris also damages the EUs regional interests.

MEP Nathalie Loiseau of Renew Europe told EURACTIV that thousands of Albanians come to France and seek asylum: How can we open negotiations with Albania? she wondered. She said Albanians go to France without a visa and then request to benefit from refugee status, which is often denied to them.

Either thousands of Albanians deserve refugee status, which in itself questions whether Albania can be an EU candidate. Or human traffickers and the mafia are operating from Albania to Western Europe and encourage illegal migration. Therefore the fight against organised crime needs to be improved in Albania, the French politician said.

No elections in Albania

However in Tirana, Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama has ruled out any scenario for elections.

Not only we wont go to early elections, we will carry on working like before. On 19 October the sun will rise again. Albania has no need to go to early elections, because the country did all it had to do for this process, he said.

If early elections could resolve the problem between France and Germany I would seriously consider them, Rama added.

Kaynak/Source: