



JANUARY 2016

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Macedonia Office

FOCUS

Transitional Government Elected, Disagreements Remain

Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski has fulfilled his obligations of the Przino agreement by submitting his resignation to the Macedonian Parliament on 15 January. For the first time since its independence in 1990, Macedonia has formed a transitional government until the next parliamentary elections scheduled for 24 April. This decision was made by the MPs of the governing coalition in the absence of the opposition. Emil Dimitriev, Secretary General of VMRO-DPMNE, was elected as interim prime minister while other ministers from the previous government kept their posts. The oppositional SDSM reacted by announcing that it is not going to participate in the upcoming elections. SDSM ministers and deputy ministers, however, will keep on working within the transitional government at least until the official dissolution of the assembly on 24 February. According to the opposition, there won't be credible elections without a credible electoral roll and revised media regulations.

Previously, the VMRO-DPMNE withdrew all its amendments and remarks regarding the method for the revision of the electoral roll and accepted the methodology proposed by the State Election Commission (SEC). The SDSM insisted on a full field verification of the electoral roll, believing that the proposed methodology for revision by the SEC does not have the full confidence of the citizens. They eventually accepted the revised methodology, arguing that they do not want to be labeled as the culprits hindering the process. After obtaining the written consent of all the main parties, the SEC adopted the rules for the methodology for full access, changes and deletion of data in the electoral roll, as well as a procedure for conducting on-site inspections to update it.

On 20 February, the EU and the US are going to announce whether the Przino agreement has been implemented and if the conditions for holding fair and democratic elections on 24 April have been met. Aivo Orav, EU Ambassador to Macedonia, and US Ambassador Jess Baily submitted a

Dear readers,

as a new year begins, the challenges still remain the same as last year. To overcome political crisis, it is vital to make full use of political dialogue, both internal as well as external. Our offices will keep on trying to modestly contribute to this process.

We would like to thank you for your positive feedback so far and will keep on developing our newsletters. Enjoy our colourful feature for this month and look forward to next month's guest corner.

Kind regards,

Johannes D. Rey
& Team

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letter to PM Dimitriev with three basic conditions that have to be met until 19 February concerning the electoral roll, media reforms and the separation of party activities from the state.

Commissioner Hahn Met Macedonia's Political Leaders

A meeting between the Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, and the leaders of Macedonia's four major political parties ended without reaching consensus on holding early elections in April. Nevertheless, Hahn stressed that the Przino agreement was not dead. He further stated that fair and democratic elections according to European standards could only be held if all parties were committed to it.

After a letter was submitted to PM Dimitriev by the Ambassadors of the EU and the US, it is very likely that Hahn will visit Skopje again in mid-February to present a three-point plan that is supposed to make the opposition participate in the election and to ensure a credible election. According to the plan, the capacities of the SEC will be strengthened, opposition parties will have full access to the media and the SDSM will have representatives in the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services. Further, the Commissioner, EU member states, the OSCE, the SEC and Macedonian NGOs together will check the preparations and monitor the election process.

Juncker: Macedonia a "Second Line of Defense"

President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker sent a letter to the Slovenian government in which he expresses support for Slovenia's proposal that the EU should help strengthen the Macedonian-Greek border to stop the influx of migrants. According to the plan, most of the migrants who are already in Greece would stay there, easing the pressure on the transfer countries as well as Austria and Germany. If this plan is going to be implemented, all EU countries should provide assistance by allocating police/law enforcement officers and equipment to the Macedonian authorities to strengthen its border controls.



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Macedonia's Political Crisis Must Be Solved

The answers to the political crisis in Macedonia lie in Skopje, not in Brussels and they must be found soon. It is important to work hard in order to fulfill the responsibilities arising from the Przino Agreement. All the measures for free and fair elections in April need to be implemented, stressed Secretary of State for Europe in the German Federal Foreign Office, Michael Roth, during his visit to Skopje. According to Roth, political leaders finally have to understand that their country's future depends on this. He further noted that the cooperation with Macedonia in the migrant crisis will not result in political concessions regarding its EU integration process.

AND WE SAY...

Regarding the challenges in 2016

The Przino agreement brokered by Commissioner Hahn was reached in June/July 2015 after half a year of political tensions, caused by the SDSM's publishing of wiretapped materials. Currently, the country is in a very difficult situation: political crisis, upcoming early elections, and the migration crisis in Europe. If the EU decides to close its borders, it will have an immediate effect on the country and Macedonia as a "second line of defense" against uncontrolled migration will need European support to cope with this serious situation. Macedonia, together with FRONTEX, will be put in a situation of having to defend the EU's external borders. A job that should be done by the EU-member Greece.

If the political crisis remains unsolved it will also affect economic development and the Euro-Atlantic perspective. The only possible outcome to this situation are credible and democratic elections. The decision to conduct early elections on 24 April is part of the Przino agreement and it is crucially important that all political and institutional actors do their utmost to ensure fair elections in line with EU standards. Now it definitely is the SEC's turn as an independent body to organize the elections, to implement the methodology for revision of the electoral roll and to say if it is possible to provide a revised voters list on time.

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EU support is needed, not only to help overcome the political crisis but also with Macedonia as a “second line of defense” against uncontrolled migration, and regarding the country’s lagging Euro-Atlantic integration. Like any country in the region faced with the daily influx of refugees, Macedonia will not be able to respond to the challenges without proper help.

KAS NEWS CORNER

After the official visit of Michael Thielen, Secretary General of KAS, and Patrick Voller, Secretary of External Relations of the European People’s Party, at the end of last year, KAS proceeds with its mission to build bridges and to promote a new political dialogue. In January, the KAS hosted **Christian Kremer**, Deputy Secretary General of the European People’s Party. During his visit, Kremer met with high-ranking officials and stakeholders with whom he discussed the current political situation and the future challenges for Macedonia on its path towards the EU.



Mr. Christian Kremer with the KAS team in Macedonia Office

He also had the opportunity to be informed about the impact of the refugee crisis and visited the refugee reception center in Gevgelija at Macedonian–Greek border, where he was introduced to the measures taken by state institutions. Kremer also had a meeting with the Mayor of Gevgelija, Ivan Frangov, whose municipality is the most affected.