



Dear readers,

In a political climate where events are evolving not only month by month or week by week but almost on a daily basis, keeping you up to date can be challenging. In times like these, boredom is something unheard of and if some developments cannot not be fully understood, a little wisdom might help:

“We all live under the same sky, but we don't all have the same horizon”
(Konrad Adenauer)

Enjoy this monthly for February and our new guest corner.

Kind regards,

Johannes D. Rey
& Team

Edited by Matthias
Meyer

FOCUS

Early Parliamentary Elections Postponed for June

After intensive talks mediated by MEPs Ivo Vajggj, Eduard Kukan and Richard Howitt, leaders of the four major political parties agreed on postponing the early parliamentary elections from 24 April to 5 June. The decision was made after the assessment of the international community and a request from the oppositional SDSM, who argued that the time given to the State Election Commission (SEC) to clean up the voters' list was not sufficient (a crucial precondition for having fair and democratic elections). It was adopted by the Macedonian Parliament with 83 votes in favor and 3 against. The MEPs of the SDSM didn't vote because - as the party has stated - only those who had previously voted for having early elections in April should participate in the vote.

The leader of the ruling Party VMRO-DPMNE Gruevski stated that despite the fact that the conditions for early elections on 24 April were fulfilled, the proposal for a new date was accepted for the good of the country. According to the ruling VMRO-DPMNE, there is no need for additional negotiations until 5 June, including the negotiations on the media law, as the SEC will gain enough time to finish all the procedures for updating the voters' register. On the other hand, SDSM accused VMRO-DPMNE of attempting to push the country into a dramatic crisis by violating the Przino Agreement and not being truly dedicated to implementing media reforms and filtering the voters' list. All of which are main preconditions for free, fair and democratic elections.

The European Parliament adopts Resolution on Macedonia

On 29 February, with a delay of six days due to recent political developments in Macedonia and the rescheduling of early parliamentary elections, the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament dropped a Resolution on Macedonia with 42 votes in favor and 9 against, which includes the 7th consecutive recommendation for opening EU accession negotiations. According to the EP Rapporteur for Macedonia, Ivo Vajggj, this year's recommendation is also conditional (mentioned in the EU Progress Report from Nov. 2015) and depends on the continued implementation of the Przino agreement, substantial progress in the implementation of the urgent reform priorities and successful organization of the elections on 5 June. Further on the 10th of March the Resolution was overwhelmingly adopted by the European Parliament with 404 votes in favor, 74 against and 29 in abstention.

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GUEST CORNER

There are a number of responsibilities assigned to the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Macedonia and it is possible and desired to bring out the main points.

A specific focus of my activities is the presentation and discussion around Macedonian foreign policy in different contexts of the European education work with varying target groups.

In these days when the situation on the border of the Republic of Macedonia with Greece threatens to escalate as the refugees have tried to attack the border installations to enter the Republic of Macedonia, my activities are especially in demand, because the Republic of Macedonia becomes a centre of international media attention.

In Germany there are sporadic demonstrations in front of the diplomatic representations of

Pressure at Southern Border with Greece Increases

On 12 February, Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki welcomed his Austrian Counterpart Sebastian Kurz. On this occasion, Kurz expressed appreciation for Macedonia's efforts to cope with the refugee crisis and stressed Austria's readiness to support the country with additional police force and equipment to secure its southern border if needed.

In this manner, President Gjorgje Ivanov attended the extraordinary summit dedicated to the refugee crisis in Prague, where the prime ministers of the Visegrad-group countries, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland as well as Bulgaria were present. Further, on 24 February, Foreign Minister Poposki attended the summit in Vienna on the refugee crisis organized by the Austrian Government, at which Ministers of selected countries of the Balkan-route, such as Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia as well as Austria, agreed to tighten border controls. Greece and most of the other 28 EU member states were not invited to the conference. On 2 March, Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, visited the country and discussed the challenges of the refugee crisis with President Ivanov and the authorities in charge. Although there was no official press-conference at the start of his tour along the Balkan route, he sent the message to Macedonia and all countries concerned, that they won't be left alone by the EU and that a common European solution and a return to the Schengen System are the only possible solutions for coping with the crisis.

The stricter border control, especially after Austria's decision to accept 80 asylum applications while permitting up to 3,200 refugees to transit the country per day, as well as the decision of the countries on the Balkan route to give passage only to refugees from Syria and Iraq and to temporarily refuse the entry of Afghans, contributed to increasing the pressure on the southern border with Greece. At this time, round 15,000 refugees are stranded on the Greek side, at Idomeni, near the border waiting for the Macedonian authorities to let them through, with numbers increasing daily. The site at border elevation 59 already has a wire fence set up in order to increase security and have a more controlled influx of refugees. During recent protests on 29 February, some refugees attempted to breach the gate of the frontier fence on elevation 59 which forced Macedonian security forces to use tear gas and stun grenades to disperse the crowd and prevent a larger incident. According to the authorities, Macedonia is acting according to the decisions and reactions of those countries that are the refugees' final destinations, thus letting as many refugees enter as their destination countries are willing to accept. Currently, since the last EU leaders meeting with Turkey on the 7th of March, the Balkan route is officially closed and no refugees are passing the Greek-Macedonian border.

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the Republic of Macedonia. The number of defamatory emails increases significantly. There is basically a lack of understanding how the public authorities of the Republic of Macedonia are acting. This becomes very clear during discussions with interested people in Germany I have every day.

The Republic of Macedonia makes ceaselessly clear that it is necessary to develop a European crisis management but this is unfortunately lacking. Europe is facing a challenge for the entire continent not only for the European Union. The Republic of Macedonia is not a member of the European Union yet, nevertheless it is doing everything as a part of the European solution.

The present situation does not allow any further waiting as long as Brussels will take

In the meanwhile, in an interview with the German newspaper BILD given on the 10th of March, country's President Gjorge Ivanov had harshly criticized EU for leaving Macedonia in the lurch, accusing Brussels for not giving any financial support to the country's government to cope with the crisis, as well as for its absence of will to cooperate in exchange of information on suspected Islamist militants. Official Berlin and Brussels rejected these accusations.

AND WE SAY...**Regarding the Decision to postpone the Elections**

Early parliamentary elections and media reforms are both part of the Przino Agreement and there is no doubt that all parties concerned have to work towards its implementation. Media reforms are more than necessary and in this regard the country should demonstrate its highest dedication. But the necessary changes in the field of media, mentioned in the Przino Agreement, pointed out in nearly all Progress reports of the European Commission, cannot happen at once – nor by only stipulating a date or simply by adopting a new law on media. As a matter of fact, it is a long-lasting process which cannot be put in a simple time frame. In this manner, it is also up to each media house, television company, web-portal and each single journalist to make efforts of their own. They should stick to the basic principles of objective and independent journalism and report according to what they all committed themselves to by signing the Code on Ethical Reporting during elections.

As an independent body, the SEC has now gained more time to organize early elections according to the highest international standards. It is crucially important that all political and institutional actors in the country do their utmost to ensure fair elections and not to give space to any of the political actors to boycott or not to recognize the election results. Any further delay of the parliamentary elections will for sure affect the country's economic development and its Euro-Atlantic perspective, which would cause serious damage to both the country and its citizens.

Regarding Macedonia's EU Perspective

Macedonia received the candidate status 11 years ago and it would be the seventh year in a row that the country gets the recommendation to start accession negotiations with the EU. Thus, the country is further left in a waiting room of the EU and each year the euro-enthusiasm is fading. The blockade of the integration process causes frustration within society, possible reasons for political instability and tense inter-ethnic relations. The perception of politics and society regarding the EU and its institutional mechanisms has rapidly changed in the past years and the recommendations and concerns by the international community for the countries

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a joint decision that will be accepted by all the EU countries. As a result of this, I am afraid, it is necessary to take own decisions. "In times of this crisis each country has to find now again its own solution" – said President Ivanov during one interview with a German news portal spiegelonline on 29.02.2016.

A human gesture of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel to open German borders for refugees enjoys a high level of respect in the Republic of Macedonia.

Closed borders cannot be in the interest of the Republic of Macedonia. But memories of the time that the people of the Republic of Macedonia have experienced during the war in Kosovo 1999 become awake. More than 360.000 refugees came to Macedonia. None of our neighbouring countries has helped us at that time and hosted the refugees.

development are losing their original purpose. This affects not only the country's reform process, but could be considered as a risk for the whole region, which is a part of Europe. In this regard, the EU should make more of an effort to more openly support the integration process of the country and the Western-Balkan region on the whole, which also includes more concrete support in solving open bilateral issues. The recent developments on the Greek-Macedonian border are another evidence that there are no problems of one country in the region, but problems which affect the whole region. Therefore, EU mediation is needed.

Regarding the recent Developments on the Southern Border

Small Balkan countries like Macedonia with limited capacities and resources have the fear to become hotspots where refugees will be detained by force, causing serious damage to the security and stability of the country. On the one hand, the country is facing the challenge of sticking to the measures and decisions adopted on EU level, and on the other of reacting to individual measures and decisions taken by other countries on the route. The recent scenes at the southern border with Greece are a clear indicator that no single country can cope with the crisis on its own. In this manner, a common strategy is urgently needed that involves all countries concerned, which are part of the route, EU as well as non-EU countries. Every further delay of the problem could be a serious risk for the region and Europe to be facing a serious humanitarian catastrophe.

KAS NEWS CORNER

From 15 – 20 February 2016, as a follow-up of the new political dialogue started in 2015 and after numerous visits of different officials in Macedonia, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation invited a group of **parliamentarians and politicians from the VMRO-DPMNE to visit Berlin**. During the visit, the Macedonian delegation met with parliamentarians from the German Bundestag, officials from the chancellery and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as with high representatives from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. The delegation had the chance to discuss the current political developments of the country, as well as the challenges from the refugee crisis and its impact on both countries, Macedonia and Germany.

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It cannot be that the Republic of Macedonia would become a refugee camp if the borders towards the North are closed.

A fair European solution involving all the actors concerned, also the candidate countries from the Western Balkan and Turkey is a clear interest of the politics and the people in the Republic of Macedonia.

Holger-Michael Arndt

The Honorary Consul of the Republic of Macedonia in Germany based in Düsseldorf

Views expressed in the guest corner are the personal views of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation



The Macedonian delegation meeting Dr. Wolfgang Maier and Ms. Ingrid Garwels at the Headquarters of KAS in Berlin

Furthermore, between 25 -27 February, the KAS together with our Macedonian partner, the Pavel Shatev Institute, organized the traditional **Political Academy** – a series of lectures and trainings on the principles of a democratic political culture. The this year's event was on the topic "Modern Peoples Party" and was attended by about 80 active politicians, party members and mandate holders and supported by domestic and international experts and lecturers.