

## EP recommends Accession talks with Macedonia

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The

Council of EU at its summit on December 7 to confirm European Commission's recommendation for start of accession talks with Macedonia, it is required by a resolution on EU enlargement with Western Balkan countries, Turkey and Iceland, which was endorsed with a majority of votes by the European Parliament (EP) on Thursday.

The document prepared by the chairman of EP's Foreign Affairs Committee, Italian MEP Gabriele Albertini, doesn't condition the launch of membership talks with a prior name row settlement. Instead it encourages Macedonia and Greece to boost their efforts to resolve the issue, because "a mutually acceptable solution could be found".

Use of name Macedonia caused a heated discussion late Wednesday at the European Parliament plenary session.

German MEP Bernd Posselt opposed Greek deputy Nikolaos Salavrakos, who asked MEPs not to use name Macedonia but the interim reference.

"Macedonia is Macedonia and will remain Macedonia.

These discussions will certainly not help the neighboring country", said Posselt, reminding on the similar stance of Greens leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit.

Deutsche Welle-Macedonian Program reported that Posselt earlier asked for mitigation of the wording used in the resolution, which includes too much accusations towards Macedonia when referring to bilateral good neighborly relations, since "it is not the only country responsible".

Chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Committee EU-Macedonia, German MEP Jorgo Chatzimarkakis claimed that the country's only problem was the name issue.

"The important thing is just to jump over a shadow.

I think the two parties are ready to go one step further. A five-minute meeting between the countries' PMs on Friday will not solve the whole issue. However, the objective is important, whereas more time is required to find a permanent solution. If not, a hastened settlement could be reached, which would be catastrophic in the long-term", added Chatzimarkakis.

In a statement for Radio Deutsche Welle, Chatzimarkakis said a solution to the name has been found.

"The two countries have already agreed on the name.

However, its use is causing problems. Nevertheless, the current spirit provides the opportunity for a solution", he added.

EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn, who participated at the EU plenary session, said Macedonia is ready to start the Union's accession negotiations and there is still a possibility for settling the name row ahead of the EU Summit in December.

Resolving of the name problem would add to Macedonia's chances to get a date, Radio Deutsche Welle-Macedonian language programme quoted Rehn's address before the the Joint Parliamentary Committee EU-Macedonia in Strasbourg.

The EU Enlargement Commissioner noted Macedonia's progress towards the membership, pointing out that the country is capable to start the negotiations with the Union.

Rehn called on MEPs to encourage their governments to make a brave decision on Macedonia in line with the EU strategic interests, which also includes the enlargement process.

The resolution adopted by EP welcomes the recent establishment of diplomatic relations between Macedonia and Kosovo and the signing of an agreement on physical border demarcation, which are seen as positive contribution to regional stability.

Macedonia is commended as well for the progress made

in recent months and which was acknowledged by the European Commission by recommending launch of accession talks with EU.

Furthermore, the document urges Macedonian authorities to resume reform processes, especially in public administration and judiciary, fight against corruption, women's rights and inter-ethnic relations, including guarantees for the rights of members of all ethnic communities and their increased participation in public administration.

MEPs also welcomed the upcoming visa liberalisation for Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, which is expected to enter into force as of Dec. 19.