

EU and Nato membership would be lifechanging for Macedonians, say Tusk and Stoltenberg

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News

The EU and NATO have insisted that the name agreement between Athens and Skopje has created a “historic opportunity” for the country to join the transatlantic and European community as an “equal member.”



Photo credit: Adobe Stock

The EU and NATO have insisted that the name agreement between Athens and Skopje has created a “historic opportunity” for the country to join the transatlantic and European community as an “equal member.”

European council president Donald Tusk and Nato secretary general Jens Stoltenberg were speaking after Sunday’s inconclusive “name change” referendum in Macedonia.

The tiny land-locked country's citizens were asked to endorse a deal struck with Greece, rechristening the state 'North Macedonia' in what was generally seen as a stepping stone to EU and Nato membership.

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But the result, which fell short of a '50 per cent plus one voter' threshold, suggests that calls to boycott the vote had had an effect, with only 34.7 per cent, or 623,000 people, casting a ballot.

The country's prime minister Zoran Zaev says he will still try to ratify the name deal via a vote in the country's parliament.

Tusk and Stoltenberg said that EU and Nato membership for Macedonia "would change the life of the people of the country and that of their children for the better."

"In the referendum, an overwhelming majority of those voting supported that path. It is now in the hands of politicians in Skopje to decide on the way forward. The decisions they take in the next days and weeks will determine the fate of their country and their people for many generations to come."

"The decisions the [people] take in the next days and weeks will determine the fate of their country and their people for many generations to come" European council president Donald Tusk and Nato secretary general Jens Stoltenberg

Further reaction came from MEPs with European Green Party co-chairs Reinhard Bütikofer and Monica Frassoni saying, "the country's way towards Nato membership and EU accession negotiations remains very difficult. But one result cannot be disputed: It is impossible to read a rejection into the referendum result.

"The Macedonian opposition chose to boycott because it was afraid it would lose a fair and open contest. Russian meddling in Macedonian affairs supported them in that approach.

"But the result does not allow them to dispute the fundamental truth about the Macedonian people's will. There is no majority in the country to oppose the way forward which the government devised.

"The responsibility for the next steps will now return to the Macedonian Parliament. Europe must keep its arms open to welcome the Macedonian nation."

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter for the Parliament Magazine

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