

## Pro-Western Pendarovski wins North Macedonia presidential election

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News

Stevo Pendarovski, a pro-Western ruling Social Democratic Union candidate, stormed to victory in North Macedonia's runoff presidential election on Sunday, an outcome which has been greeted by the EU.



Skopje, North Macedonia | *Photo credit: Press Association*

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Voters in North Macedonia elected the government-backed candidate who wants to bring the country into NATO under its new name over a rival who had pledged to challenge the name change if elected.

Pendarovski, the candidate of the ruling coalition and a long-serving senior civil servant and academic, had about 52 percent of the vote, according to the latest figures.

This compares with Siljanovska Davkova, his main rival, who got 44.7 percent of the vote.

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Pendarovski has stood by a recent deal with Greece to make a change in the country's name, from the Republic of Macedonia to North Macedonia.

The country is now expected to press ahead with membership of NATO and, in the longer term, the European Union. North Macedonia expects to get a date to start EU accession talks in June.

"The agreement is a good agreement, a necessary agreement," declared Pendarovski late on Sunday as the final results came in.

University lecturer Davkova, is, like Pendarovski, also pro-EU, but has opposed the agreement with Greece over the country's name change and was backed by the main conservative opposition party.

"The agreement is a good agreement, a necessary agreement" **Stevo Pendarovski**

Greece has long blocked Macedonia's entry into NATO.

Conceding defeat on Sunday night, she said, "He won the battle, but we haven't lost the fight."

The two had finished neck and neck in the first round of voting two weeks ago.

Reacting to the election results at the weekend, EU Commissioner for European neighbourhood and enlargement negotiations Johannes Hahn welcomed the outcome.

In a tweet, he said that the tiny ex-Yugoslav republic "can count on the EU's continued support for its EU accession perspective, thus responding to the strong European aspirations of its people."

Speaking separately last month, the Commissioner said a recommendation that accession talks start soon will be made on the basis of criteria mutually agreed by EU Member States.

But Hahn said he believes that both Albania and North Macedonia have deserved the opening of negotiations, which was postponed in June last year.

"The historical agreement on ending the name dispute with Greece and friendship accords with Bulgaria are pathbreaking signals to the entire region that resolutions of long-standing disputes are possible."

"North Macedonia has also made good progress when it comes to internal reforms. The country has

deserved a green light for the opening of accession negotiations as early as possible - before the summer break”, Hahn said last month.

Further reaction on Monday came from Margot Wallstrom, Sweden’s foreign minister and a former EU Commissioner, who, in a tweet, congratulated Pendarovski on his victory.

She said Sweden “would continue to support Macedonia’s reform efforts towards EU integration.”

Voter turnout in the election was just over 46 percent, according to the State Election Commission, still low but above the legal threshold.

There had been concern that turnout might not reach the 40 percent threshold needed to make the result valid.

In what is now called North Macedonia, the president holds a largely ceremonial post but is the supreme commander of the armed forces and also signs off on parliamentary legislation.

In February, Macedonian MPs ratified a deal to change the country’s name, formally ending the dispute with Greece. The name change was later ratified by the Greek parliament.

Macedonia is now poised to become NATO’s 30th member later this year.

## About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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