

# Interview with H.E. Mr Aivo Orav,

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## HEAD OF EU DELEGATION FOR PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTER MRTV



***Exactly two weeks ago, here in the Przino residence, an agreement was signed among the four leaders of the largest political parties in Macedonia. I am discussing the political situation and EU prospects with the EU Ambassador in the country, Mr Aivo Orav.***

***Ambassador, the European facilitation improved the political dialogue in Macedonia. What are your views on the paper which was signed after several months of negotiations and how is the timescale met, have parts of the agreement started to be implemented?***

So first, thank you very much for coming here. I think it would have been much better, if there was no need for such kind of negotiations at all, if political parties could talk to each other and to find a solution by themselves. In this case the European Union and the US assisted the political parties to find their agreement and finally it was done. It was quite late and lots of valuable time for this country was lost. But finally it was done, and now I hope very much that this is a full stop for the political crisis that actually started already on 24 December 2012. You have an agreement now, we have it also, and of course I hope very much that this agreement opens the way again for this country towards the European Union as well as NATO.

***A lot of work lies ahead of Macedonia, a series of reforms need to be carried out. What are the priorities that political parties have implement now?***

So, I would like to put it into two sets. First priority clearly is the implementation of the 2 June and 15 July agreement. There are a lot of critical issues the parties may interpret in different ways, and one of the critical ones is the special prosecutor, because a special prosecutor with a full autonomy should be appointed already by 15 September. And I hope very much that the political parties can find a solution by themselves but if there is a need, then of course, we can assist again. And the second critical issue I see is the date 20 October when two new ministers have to be appointed and five deputy ministers also. Most critical here seems to be the Ministry of Interior.

Reforms...the European Union has provided the country with two important papers. One is the urgent reform priorities, and another, what is called now Priebe's report. It is a report with very clear language what the country has to do urgently, because a lot of time was lost. We have now established working groups where the four political parties are participating. It grew up from the leaders' meeting between the four major political parties. The European Union and the US are participating in this work and this is now for the working groups to start with those reforms, as soon as possible, meaning immediately.

***Ambassador, does the agreement facilitate the EU prospects for Macedonia?***

In the 2 June agreement I think the most important thing is the first paragraph of the agreement, and I would like to repeat it once more: the parties agree to put the interests of the country first and to confirm their commitment to the Euro-Atlantic integration process and democratic principles. According to the last opinion polls, 80% of the people of this country are supporting the European Union and more than 80% NATO. So it means this is the wish of the people in this country. It means what reforms that need to be done have to be implemented very, very quickly and perfectly. So there is this unique possibility for the government together with the opposition and the civil society to make those reforms now, because if it's not used now, then there won't be another chance probably anymore. So first the agreement to be implemented 100%, the second, all those reforms which were recommended for the country should be implemented now.

***What is the EU agenda for Macedonia, after six years of having recommendation to start negotiations, could we expect that negotiations with the Union will finally start?***

We are preparing the progress report here in the EU Delegation, and for us the deadline is 1 September, so we are reporting about everything we have seen positive, what we have seen negative, what needs to be done in the future.

Unfortunately, this year there is not much positive in this stage, but we can report yes there is a political agreement, but this is normal that political parties are talking with each other. We saw it after many years that four political leaders came and sat behind the same table, and this was only with the assistance of the European Union and the US at this stage. There is only one month and a few days to prepare and implement the reforms, and we have sent our list of recommendations, and I hope that August will be used in the most efficient way in this year.

The recommendation to start negotiations means that the country fulfils the Copenhagen criteria, and the Copenhagen criteria mean that the country fulfils all the democratic principles. Democracy is something that everybody talks about, but people understand it in a different way. Democracy means that if I am going at the Election Day for voting, than I know that nobody will know for whom I am voting. It means that I am not afraid that there will be pressure towards me or my family for whom I am voting. Democracy means that I can freely express myself. Democracy means also if my human rights or my rights are violated, I can go to the court and I can be sure that the court is independent and that there is no political pressure.

So all those reforms are needed and we have put it exactly in the paper now, particularly in Reinhardt Priebe's report what needs to be done. Now it's possible for the government, the opposition, the civil society to show that those things are really important for the citizens of this country.

***You mentioned the report the European Commission is to publish this autumn, and the political crisis will have certain impact. However, the final assessment will be seen in October. The judiciary and the media are areas in need of most reforms. What are the specific reforms we can expect in these sectors by 24 April?***

The issues of the media and the judiciary got quite critical remarks in our last year's



progress report already. But it's interesting for some reasons, most of the media in this country did not want to report about those critical issues in our progress report. In this country the rules are good, laws are perfect, and the question is the implementation. And in this case now, the government can show exactly that they care about European Union values.

We have given our list of recommendations and those need to be implemented. But first of all the freedom of media starts from journalists, from editors. If there is self-censorship, how can there be professional journalism? If journalists and editors are afraid of something, than how do you report independently, what is expected from a public broadcaster. And MRT is exactly the key because you are financed by the tax-payers of this country and they are expecting from you independent and professional reporting.

***Even in times of political crisis and tension, the Macedonian economy is doing well, and according to statistics, the growth has an upwards trend and numbers show arrival of new foreign investments. The debt is among the lowest in Europe. How do you see the economic situation in Macedonia?***

I think everything is interlinked. This political crisis probably influences also the economic development of the country. Now it's in the hand of the government again, and the opposition, and all other political parties. If the 2 June agreement is fully implemented, if those reforms will start now immediately, in this case I am sure that those positive trends will continue. In case no agreement is implemented, in case no reforms, than I not am sure that those positive trends will continue the same way.

***A series of EU projects are being implemented in Macedonia and IPARD funds are available. What is the interest for European money in our country?***

I think interest is remarkable, because in the European Union the Common Agricultural Policy is one of the key and most expensive policies. We are distributing money in our own member states, and we are doing the same in the candidate countries. Interest is remarkable, actually people don't believe that they can get money from the European Union. So, we have used our 9 May Europe Day events traveling around the country to explain that yes, actually it's possible to apply for money from IPARD funds and how to improve the situation in the agriculture. We continue to do it, there are several European Union projects how to implement better this policy and of course we hope that it will improve the situation in the agriculture area in this country.

***In Macedonia there is no growing euroscepticism in comparison to some other countries, which shows that citizens are counting on the European Union. Is the European Union counting on Macedonia?***

Of course, because if we don't care, than we didn't need this table and those negotiations two weeks ago. We care a lot. We want that your country would join the European Union as soon as possible. We care and we hope very much to get a positive response also from your side.

***Ambassador, thank you for the interview you have given for the public broadcasting service.***