

## INTERVIEW OF AMBASSADOR AIVO ORAV WITH MKD.MK

# SPO should not be obstructed as its work is the key test for democracy

EU ambassador, Aivo Orav, departs Macedonia with optimism that the Przino agreement will be implemented and that elections will be administered by the end of the year, which must be followed by serious reforms. In the interview for MKD.mk., he speaks about the negotiations of the four political parties, the money that European Union provides through the IPA funds, and considers the president Ivanov's abolition as the most difficult moment in the negotiations to exit the crisis.



Ambassador Orav says that the abolition was like a nuclear explosion that no one expected, which significantly delayed the crisis, and will be remembered and analyzed for quite some time. He sends a message to the state institutions to support the SPO in the same way as they support the Public prosecution office, because that would be only way to end the crisis.

**You leave Macedonia before being able to see whether the agreement will be implemented, i.e. the agreement that you mediated. Do you believe that this time the political parties will keep their word of what has been agreed, because the experience so far shows that this rarely happens?**

- Przino process came across many delays and obstructions in the course of last year. However, I hope, and, more or less, I am assured that the situation is now different because the agreement from 20<sup>th</sup> July was very clear. There are several elements that need to be implemented before 31 August when the leaders would meet and say "Yes, everything has been done" so that elections can be held later this year. I believe that no one will have some kind of excuse to withdraw the agreement, and I hope that the crisis will end this year. Another matter is what will happen after the elections, because this is only one chapter, and what needs to be done now refers to very serious efforts in order to make progress towards EU.

**However, the same happened in the past, there was an agreement, there were deadlines, and they were not respected. Why do you think that everything that was agreed will be now respected?**

- I believe so because this agreement is very simple. It would require completion of two things by 31 August. One is the Voters List. The process of cleaning up the Voters List is slow, but also very stable. The second matter refers to the process about the media, which is shortened. But, everything is quite measurable, which means 'yes, the two matters are completed' or "no, these two matters are not completed". I believe that these will be completed by 31 August.

**If political parties do not respect the deadlines, which will be the danger?**

- If that is the case, we shall have endless negotiations again.

**If one compares the Przino agreement 1 from last year and Przino agreement 2 from this year, which one was more difficult to reach and why?**

- Both agreements were difficult, but Przino 1 was different as there were more involved actors and more improvisations. It was not quite clear where the political parties will

stop and what exactly will be achieved. This time it was easier, given that it was absolutely clear that consent must be reached about the conditions, what needs to be done to hold the elections, and that these conditions must be measurable. This time, negotiations took a long time, almost two months, but just like last year, this year, the biggest problem were the long-lasting internal consultations of the political parties to take position before they return to the negotiation table. It required decisiveness, because hard decisions cannot be easily made if prolonged.



**Were political parties more cooperative last year or now?**

- It depends. All political parties, of course, have different interests, take care about their rating and there were moments when one political party was more cooperative and moments when the other political party was more cooperative. However, it is interesting that in the last two weeks of the negotiations, all four political parties were very cooperative, and the four representatives who negotiated really wanted to achieve result. I think that was the best part of the negotiations.

**Which political party was easiest to cooperate with?**

- We came across all kinds of moments; however, what was required and most important was the decision-making, and not postponement of making decisions.

Second, if one makes a promise, it has to be fulfilled, and thirdly it is the respect for the time of the other. One should not be left “waiting “because of consultations, as this is not the best thing. There was a lot of waiting and waiting because of decision-making within the political parties. But I would not point the finger to anyone because the process was quite long, almost one year, and we came across all kinds of things throughout the process. Last year, there were moments when the two Albanian political parties made an attempt to push for compromise and encourage the other two parties. I would even say, that was the case in many critical moments.

**What did the Macedonian politicians mostly bother you about?**

- Everywhere, just like the people, the politicians are also different. Some of them live up to their promises, some respect the time of the other, and some are more decisive. It is easy to cooperate with those who can decide, who have the mandate to decide and who are sincere.

**Do Macedonian politicians live up to their promises or not?**

- If one knows that things cannot be done, it's better not to make promises.

**Are Macedonian politicians aware of the consequences for the country if the current status does not change?**

- Indeed, they are quite aware. I think they know that if it wasn't for the agreement, it would have been almost impossible for EU to give another recommendation to start the negotiations talks. However, a lot remains to be done. Of course, the first thing is the full implementation of the agreement, but that would not be enough. This should be followed by reforms. A lot of time is wasted and your country needs to catch up with the neighboring countries, and the normal and constructive cooperation with EU to be restored.

**What do you mean by saying that a lot of time is wasted?**

- It means that this political crisis lasts for almost two years now, or counted from 24 December 2012, it is almost four years. Regretfully, one could not see any reforms these years. Other countries made progress, and your country is at the deadlock. There

are many problems in EU, many difficulties outside of EU, the world around us undergoes changes. Your country and the politicians should decide whether they are assured that EU and NATO are their primary goal, but this would not require only words, but also work.

### **You do not see this happening now?**

- What I can see now is at least willingness to end the crisis, and then we shall evaluate the undertaken reforms.



**Which would be the consequences for Macedonia regarding the European integration process and what kind of sanctions may the country face?**

- I would avoid the word sanctions, because we speak about a candidate country for EU membership and our relations are based on the assumptions that one day you will join EU. You want to do that and we assess the progress.

**What does the reduction of IPA funds mean, a penalty, a warning or real reduction of funds?**

- The reduction of IPA funds happened more than one month ago, and that was a big amount. But, I would like to mention that EU spends 100 million Euros annually, which is a lot of money. This money is primarily allocated for the government, i.e. for infrastructure, public administration, ecology, agriculture and civic society. Rule of law is one of the key issues. Unfortunately, we witnessed something very interesting few months ago, a negative surprise – the abolition by the President, and then the partial withdrawal of the abolition. This is not something which is sponsored by EU here, if one speaks about the concept of rule of law. We want to see progress, and when the cut of EU funds happened, there were many different reasons behind this, but it is clear that

the political situation was one of the elements. But, let me point out that the statements made in public that EU does not give money for your country are not useful at all, because as I previously said, EU gives 100 million Euros annually. Second, it cannot be very useful, given that EU finances big infrastructure projects in the country, and we get the impression in the media that the funds are provided by the state.

**You say that most of the funds are primarily given to the government. Does the government use this money properly and what is it used for?**

- When we provide the funds, we need to be certain that they are properly spent. In case of doubts, we make inspections and send inspectors. A lot of funds are now allocated for the judiciary; however, we witnessed some problems in the reforms of the judiciary, and i.e. how the funds are spent. Then was the abolition, which was really shocking. That is something that EU can neither accept nor understand.

**Given that you mentioned the abolition, what is the damage inflicted to the country from the decision of the President?**

- We speak about a candidate-country, and in order to join the EU and make progress, we would like to see democratic reforms. This act by the president cannot be included in this category.

**Do you think that the abolition was just a bad episode in politics or it has long-term consequences for Macedonia?**

- I think this will be remembered and analyzed for a long time.

**Speaking about the president, on several occasions he noted that Macedonian politicians should pay less visits to foreign embassies. What do you think about this comment?**

- I think it would have been better if the president of the country was the one who mediated in the resolution of the crisis in the past four years.



**Which was the most difficult moment during the negotiations?**

- Last year, that was the abolition. It was like a nuclear explosion, which no one expected. That decision significantly delayed the crisis. Then, there were many moments when the deadlines were not respected, which was very frustrating and again with many delays.

**Do you expect that the Special Prosecution Office would really do the work for which it was established? Is it possible that any of the politicians are really held responsible for the accusations, because given the current functioning of the judiciary that would be difficult to achieve?**

- I think that politicians don't differ from other people, so if they engaged in misconduct, they should also suffer the consequences. Otherwise, the SPO is a very emotional topic here, and that is understandable. There are many emotions, some defend it, some attack it; however, from the aspect of EU, the developments around SPO and the finalization of its work shall be one of the key tests of democracy. We do care about that a lot and closely monitor the continuation of this process.

**You do care, but that is not the case with our judiciary...**

- When I talk about the judicial reforms, it means that we monitor these processes, we monitor what the Constitutional court did last year, as well as the courts. There was criticism that we are very “close” to the courts, but let me remind that we need to assess what you do as candidate-country to join the EU, while the judiciary and the court system are one of the key elements.

**Do you think that the SPO can normally function as it was foreseen at the time it was established?**

- There are numerous difficulties and I think that the politicians should enable the SPO to complete its work; all state institutions should support the SPO as they support the Public prosecution office, because that would be the only way to end the crisis. When I say support, I mean that the work of the SPO should not be obstructed, but let me stress that it is very emotional. Emotions should disappear.

**You did spend a lot of time with the Macedonian politicians, maybe more than necessary. Now, at the end of your term in Macedonia, how would you assess the Macedonian politicians, as people who really care about their country or their political party?**

- The problem here, and possibly in the other countries in the region, is that everything is politicized. Extremely. Anyone who is affiliated to the political party or a member is more important than the professional. This is not a new problem here; it exists for decades. Labelling such as spy, traitor, state enemy are very comfortably used, so people who criticize are simply put on the other side of the “front”. There is distinction if one is from “my” political party or the opposition, because the opposition is considered as enemy, unfortunately. If you want to have such a system, and you want to join the EU, it means that the political parties which are extremely politicized, should closely work together, have mutual understanding and common approach towards EU. I already mentioned that the last two weeks of the negotiations were very constructive. The representatives were mandated by the political parties to reach an agreement, to find compromise and that was a unique experience that needs to be applied beyond Prion. If work is undertaken that way, progress can be made.

**What is your opinion, why were they cooperative in the last two weeks? Does it have anything to do with the IPA fund cuts?**

- All political parties decided that they want to reach the agreement as soon as possible. That was quite interesting to be seen. Everyone wanted to reach an agreement, and despite the huge differences, the party representatives tried to offer solutions that take into consideration the concerns and understanding of others. It was a very positive thing. Nevertheless, I would not be able to confirm if that was related to the cutting of IPA funds.



**What did you learn about Macedonia before you came, and which are the impressions at your departure?**

- I came to be an EU ambassador in 2012, and previously I was a non-resident ambassador of Estonia since 2005. I knew it would be rather difficult for several reasons, but I did not expect such

challenges for my work here. Given the visible part of the work, I had public appearances and took part in the negotiations. However, the work of an EU ambassador is more complex. Coordination of the activities of EU member-states, IPA funds, management of the Delegation. These were the challenges, but my main interest was to defend the interests of EU. More or less, I believe this has been realized. My principle as diplomat is neither to love nor hate. Only in such circumstances can one diplomat be objective, and I hope that this principle was respected.

**Which are the biggest problems of Macedonia?**

- There was only one problem five years ago, and now the “menu “refers to the complete rule of law, freedom of media and political dialogue. The table now needs to be cleaned from both sides, step by step.

However, I consider the pollution as one of the biggest problems. Its summertime and nobody seems to be thinking of the pollution, but November will come very soon. It harms peoples' health, equally for SDSM and VMRO people.

**Are you concerned by the accusations that some politicians make that you and the American ambassador interfere almost everywhere?**

- I wish there was no need for that. Let me remind that after the Kumanovo incidents last year, there was no one to bring the political leaders together on the table. Together with Jess Baily, we did it, and I think that was a crucial moment for the country. Any further escalation of the situation was avoided. One may speculate what could have happened if the four leaders did not meet and call for composure.

**Do you think that in a situation of long-lasting political crisis, the name issue is put aside?**

- I think that this issue was shadowed by all the other issues. But, this issue remains and it is a major problem. I hope that after the elections, the politicians will get back to it.

**You leave the country and move to Montenegro. What do you expect there, a stormy mandate like here or having more time to explore the Montenegrin beaches?**

- There will be challenges in Monte Negro, as well. The country is before NATO accession, negotiates with EU, so the EU ambassador will have a more of a technical role. The chapters need to be reviewed and many information needs to be checked. It's true that the work differs from here, which does not necessarily mean it's easier. This political crisis has turned into a routine for me.

Zana P. Bozinovska