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Macedonia

No more alibis for the Council, negotiations must start immediately



The International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled yesterday that Greece has breached an earlier deal with Macedonia, when it blocked Skopje's bid to join NATO in 2008, because of the dispute over the country's name. The Greens welcomed the ruling and maintain that bilateral disputes should never be misused as leverage to block a country's progress in its path towards the EU. Instead, disputes should be dealt with via an EU arbitrage mechanism. The European Parliament already called for such a mechanism in a resolution last year.

The Greens also believe that a solution to the name isssue is close as long as the parties show understanding and flexibility. Greens acknowledge, in this respect, the efforts made by the Papandreu government and consider it an important contribution to reach a compromise on the name as long as the cultural and linguistic identity of Macedonia is not affected.

Commenting on the ruling, Greens/EFA spokesperson on Macedonia, **Marije Cornelissen** said:

"This ruling of the ICJ is clear: a bilateral issue over the name should not be used to hamper Macedonia's accession to NATO or the EU. I hope that the Council will use this ruling to put as much pressure on Greece as is necessary to lift their blockade of Macedonia's progress towards the EU. It is high time that the name issue stops contaminating political process and is solved through arbitration.

Greens/EFA spokesperson on Foreign Affairs, **Ulrike Lunacek** added:

"In times of economic and debt crisis Greece should take the ICJ ruling as a political signal to let go symbolic struggles and focus on real issues affecting people's lives. Six years of blocking EU candidate Macedonia's start of accession negotiations is more than enough: The ICJ has made a very clear ruling on Macedonia's NATO accession, and EU member states should use this to put political pressure on Greece to give the green light for negotiations with Macedonia

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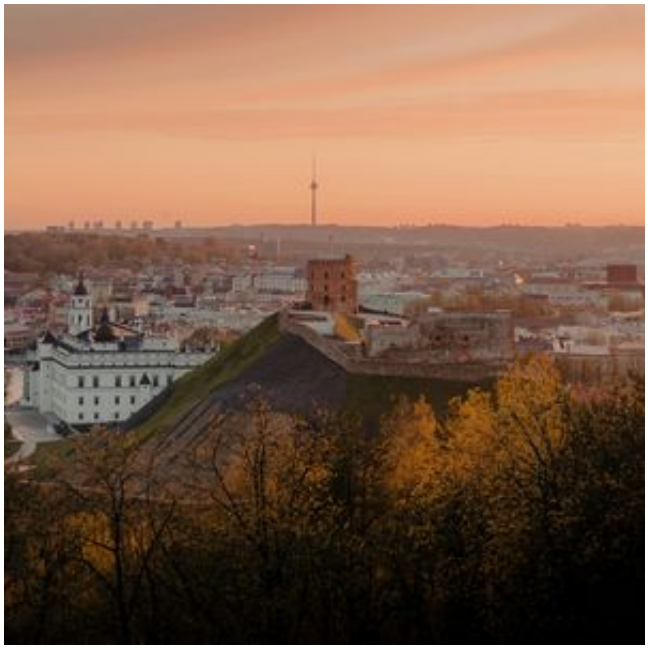
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