

Priorities of the Spanish Presidency of the EU and its reflections on Macedonia

On January 1, 2010 Spain took over the Presidency of the European Union, and for the next 6 months it should provide smooth and cooperative atmosphere with the newly appointed political figures.

In this regard Spain is the first EU member state that will lead the Presidency in accordance with the freshly adopted Lisbon Treaty. In the next 6 months Spain will have to work on adjusting the EU institutions with the new rules under the Lisbon Treaty. The implementation of the Lisbon Treaty also understands that Spain will have to share certain powers with the newly elected European President, Herman Van Rompuy.

One of the priorities that are on the top of the Spanish agenda is managing the global economic crisis and the effects it had on the EU economy. For Madrid, the most important thing in the next 6 months will be full economic recovery of the euro zone, which will increase the competitiveness of Europe in the world. Spain believes that successful implementation of the Lisbon Treaty will make EU's voice be heard on the world stage.

It also made clear that one of its priorities will be strengthening the relations with the countries of Latin America, with a special emphasis put on

Cuba, in order to reach a new bilateral agreement with this country.

The top Spanish priorities, as outlined above, suggest that the Western Balkans countries are not high on its agenda. Although Madrid considers that this part of Europe should, as soon as possible, become part of the EU in order to preserve stability in the region. However Spain stands firmly on its position that the expansion of the EU should be done very carefully. In this presidency they made it clear that more attention will be put on Croatia and Serbia. There is a hope within the EU and Spain accordingly, that Croatia will complete accession negotiations during their presidency. In addition, in several occasions it was stated that Spain has a will to support Serbia's EU's ambitions.

As for the Republic of Macedonia and its path to the European Union, Spain firmly maintains the position that only by resolving the name dispute it will be able to unlock the doors and set a date for starting the accession talks.

In Macedonia, the expectations from the Spanish presidency differ. For the Government, the opening of negotiations with the EU represents a top foreign policy priority for 2010. They expect Spain to act neutral in the next 6 months and to reopen the question for setting up

a date for negotiations. Spain's standpoint on the name issue is that only through intensive negotiations under the UN auspices, both Greece and Macedonia can find a mutually accepted solution. This will without any doubts reflect on speeding up Macedonia's EU ambitions.

For the opposition, Macedonia missed its chance to get a date for the negotiations during the Swedish Presidency which lobbied strongly for Macedonia. According to them it is clear that Spain is focused on Serbia and its integration into the European Union. Moreover the pace of Macedonia will depend on the speed with which Serbia progresses towards the EU.

No matter what are the positions of Spain, Macedonian authorities must intensify the contacts with Greece in order to find solution that will accommodate both sides so that it will not stand as an obstacle on Macedonia's EU path.

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