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Halili: “Macedonia fully committed to implementing EU migration decisions”

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At the margins of the 18th session of the Homeland & Global Security Forum organized last Friday by the Crans Montana Forum, New Europe interviewed **Festim Halili**, Deputy Prime Minister of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, ahead of the important elections which will take place on December 11. Mr Halili participated in the panel “The impact of the migration phenomena” and addressed the issue of the refugee crisis and the role of Macedonia in the Balkan route. We asked him about the upcoming election and the state of play about the EU accession talks.

Macedonia’s parliament has set December 11 as the date for parliamentary elections to try to end a long-running political crisis. Do you have any concerns ahead of the elections?

It is for the good of the people of Macedonia that the elections be fair and democratic, and therefore have to be accepted by all the political parties. We also hope that the international community will also accept the results. We believe that elections can set up an end to the political crisis and provide a new era and new opportunity for the government that will be elected by the citizens of Macedonia.

On the issue of the migration crisis, last Thursday the European Council decided to increase the protection of external borders and tighten the control of the Eastern European route. Which position does Macedonia have regarding these measures?

We are a small country which is still outside of the Union, thus the migration crisis is a big challenge for us.

Nonetheless we are very much committed to be in line with the measures that were set by the European Council. We are aiming to reach the full potential in the implementation of those measures, despite the risks that such a crisis entails for security.

Our police and our army are doing a very professional job in screening and identifying potential threats that could be infiltrated in the flow of refugees.

Are the resources provided by the European Union adequate to effectively cover the costs?

The economic impact on the limited Macedonian budget is quite considerable. We are talking about approximately 1.6 million euros allocated for covering operational costs of such services for information, identification and support to the migrants. We believe that through additional cooperation we will be able to find the adequate resources.

Recently, the election of Jovan Ilievski – chief prosecutor for organized crime in Skopje – as Macedonia’s judge in the European Court of Human Rights sparked some criticism. Ilievski is accused of having kept the prosecution system under government control during the wiretapping scandal. How do you respond to these allegations?

I represent the major Albanian political party (Democratic Union for Integration) and we have always advocated for judges’ independence from political influences. If the allegation of close ties with the ruling coalition will be confirmed by the probe, we will respect any decision based on concrete evidence.