
ALBANIA KICKS THREE OUT OF POLITICS OVER PAST CRIMES

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Albania's election commission kicked out two lawmakers from parliament and ejected a mayor from his job for failing to declare criminal records for offences overseas.

Parliament voted a year ago to remove from public office anyone who had been convicted or committed any criminal offences or misdemeanours in Albania or abroad during their lifetime.

The three deny any wrongdoing and have said they will appeal against the decision of the Central Election Commission. The lawmakers say they have been tried in absentia in Italy.

All elected politicians have been required to fill out a criminal record form after the law was passed a year ago. Since then, the authorities have combed through Albanian and foreign records, throwing up the accusations against the trio.

Kavaje mayor Elvis Rroshi, from the ruling Socialist Party, was sacked for what prosecutors say was not revealing a conviction for gang rape while in Italy, using many identities in Switzerland and being detained in Zurich in a drug case.

Shkelqim Selami, a lawmaker from the Socialist's coalition ally, was accused of failing to declare he had been detained for a week in Brindisi, Italy, over human trafficking in 1994.

Opposition Democratic Party lawmaker Dashmir Tahiri was accused by the prosecutors of failing to declare Italian police had caught him driving with a false driving licence and he had been sentenced to nine months in jail.

He and Selami say they have visited Italy regularly and not been aware of any such sentences.

Denar Biba, the head of the Central Election Commission, said they had unanimously decided to scrap the mandates of the ruling coalition politicians. The opposition members on the commission had voted against scrapping the Democrat's mandate.

The United States, who along with the European Union have been pushing the authorities to apply the law, welcomed the decision as a victory for Albanians and a warning for criminals eyeing political office in next year's parliamentary elections.

"Elected or appointed officials filing false declarations should be punished to the full extent of the law. Persons with criminal records should have no place representing the Albanian people," a statement from the U.S. Embassy in Tirana said.

(Reporting by Benet Koleka; Editing by Alison Williams)

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