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## **RAMA DECLARES HIMSELF ALBANIA'S TEMPORARY FOREIGN MINISTER**

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Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama on Monday said he would take over the position of Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, following a row with President Ilir Meta on the nomination of Gent Cakaj as the new minister.

Meta refused to decree Cakaj, claiming he "lacked credibility" for the high-profile job. Since the dispute blew up last Thursday, Meta and Rama have exchanged angry words on social media.

"The President has not decreed the dismissal of the Foreign Minister," Rama wrote on Twitter on Monday, adding that the legal deadline for the President to do so had already expired.

"This is another violation of the constitution, which will be dealt with along others in the new Constitutional Court. Up to that day, which will come soon, I will be de jure in this position because we do not have time to lose in search of a president," he added.

It is unusual for a prime minister in Albania to hold another ministerial portfolio. However, previous presidents have never rejected the prime minister's choices for ministers. The constitution does not give the President such powers.

However, Meta last October refused to appoint a new Minister of Interior and last week blocked the new Foreign Minister as well.

The constitutional court cannot rule on such conflicts currently, as the ongoing vetting process prompted most of its judges to retire, or get fired, for unjustified wealth or links with suspected criminals.

The process of nominating new members of the court is expected to last months.

Meanwhile, Albania along with Macedonia awaits the decision of the European Council on whether to open membership negotiations or not. The decision is expected in June.

President Meta was elected to his post with support of Rama's Socialist Party in April 2017. However, only months later, Meta's former party, the Socialist Movement for Integration, now headed by his wife Monika Kryemadhi, was ousted from the ruling coalition.

Now in opposition, it has repeatedly called on protesters to bring Rama's government down.

Meta has not just refused to nominate Cakaj as Foreign Minister. In an unusual Facebook post on Friday, Meta claimed he would not bow to Rama, adding a long list of crimes supposedly

committed by Rama.

"The one who dares to threaten prosecutors, judges, police officers, opposition and witnesses, the one who orders the falsification of public procurement tenders, made a fatal mistake by threatening the President of the Republic," Meta wrote, without mentioning Rama by name. "There is no any power in the world that can blackmail the President," he added.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/albania-prime-minister-declares-himself-minister-of-foreign-affairs-01-14-2019>

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