
ALBANIA OPPOSITION PREPARES BIG RALLY AGAINST 'GOVERNMENT OF THUGS'

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15.02.2019

Balkan Insight (15 February 2019)

Opposition parties in Albania are summoning their supporters from across the country to Tirana on Saturday for a major rally against Edi Rama's Socialist-led government – despite a police warning about the likely presence of criminal elements.

The centre-right Democratic Party planned the protest weeks ago and its leader, Lulzim Basha, has crisscrossed the country in the last few days, urging supporters to attend.

Visiting the small town of Burrel in northern Albania on Wednesday, Basha repeated his call.

We should join together this Saturday on the streets of Tirana in a great popular referendum that will put an end to this government of thugs, he said.

Prime Minister Rama has organized his own rival rallies in several towns across the country.

Rama appeared in Rreshen, also in the north, on Wednesday, where he promised new investments in the town's water supply and roads as well as a new sports hall.

Over the last three days, Rama has visited two towns and two villages, each time promising public investments. He has called the meetings part of a national tour called the Municipality that We Love.

Ahead of local elections due on June 30, both Rama and Basha are drumming up support in the context of an election campaign that officially starts at the end of May.

However, the announced opposition protest had already alarmed the police, which distributed an unusual press release through Whatsapp on Tuesday.

Police said they wished to share with the public concerns about the inclusion in the protest of individuals with criminal records ... who aim to create a climate of instability in Albania.

They added: Police will conduct intensive checks of vehicles on main roads to prevent people with criminal records [from taking part] in the February 16 protest.

Opposition parties accused the police of trying to scare people away from participating.

Criminals and bandits are on the side of the government and not of protesters, Gazmend Bardhi, from the Democratic Party, said.

We warn the political police of Edi Rama to stay clear from protesters and to not block their free

movement, he added.

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