
ALBANIA, MONTENEGRO, SERBIA OPPOSITIONS REFUSE TO RETURN TO PARLIAMENT

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Opposition MPs from Albania, Montenegro and Serbia have told BIRN that they will not return to their countries parliaments and will maintain protest boycotts against alleged abuses of their political systems, despite an appeal from European Commission spokesperson Maja Kocijancic.

Mrs. Kocijancic would do the same as us if she thought about it and if she was in our place, Serbian opposition MP Marinika Tepic told BIRN.

Tepic is part of a group of opposition MPs called the Alliance of Serbia, which decided this month they will not participate in parliamentary sessions or sessions held by assemblies at other levels of government across the country.

The Alliance of Serbia justified the decision by listing alleged abuses of the various assemblies by the ruling Serbian Progressive Party, led by President Aleksandar Vucic.

There is no more political dialogue in the parliament, which has been turned into a theatre of the absurd, Tepic said.

She accused the ruling party of turning the microphone down whenever an opposition lawmaker is about to speak and of obstructing debate in parliament by filing hundreds of meaningless amendments to bills that serve to prevent proper discussion.

In Albania, Izmira Ulqinaku, who was an MP for the Democratic Party but relinquished her mandate in protest on February 21, blamed the EU for not speaking out against corruption and crime in Albania.

For too long, senior figures of EU institutions have kept silent about corruption, state capture by criminal interests and the autocratic rule of [Prime Minister] Mr. [Edi] Rama, she said when asked by BIRN to respond to asked Kocijancics comments.

Western media have published judicial evidence of governments cooperation with criminal organisations to rig the 2017 elections, but there has been no reaction whatsoever from the [European] Commission, she added, referring to a joint investigation by BIRN Albania and Voice of America over collusion between organised crime networks and various officials of Ramas governing Socialist Party at the last parliamentary elections.

Thousands of Albanians migrate every year to EU countries to escape endemic corruption, crime and insecurity in Albania. Albanians have finally decided to raise their voice and protest for

democracy, freedom and good governance, instead of migrating, she added.

Kocijancic told a press conference on Monday that the European principle that parliament is a place for discussion about political and other issues should also apply to the countries of the Western Balkans, Beta news agency reported.

She said that the protests in Tirana, Podgorica and Belgrade each have their own characteristics and I would not compare these situations, according to Beta.

A journalist at Kocijancics press conference asked her why the European Commission was praising governments in the Western Balkans although they are breaking fundamental rights and the rule of law.

Kocijancic responded by insisting that the EUs progress reports on Western Balkan states are balanced.

We praise when praise is needed and deserved and if this is not the case ✱ we are also extremely critical and in this sense give very concrete and precise recommendations, she said.

In Montenegro, the majority of opposition MPs stopped attending parliamentary sessions after general elections in October 2016, alleging poll violations and demanding a fresh vote.

In June 2018, the main Montenegrin opposition party, the Democratic Front, returned to parliament, but some smaller parties have continued the boycott.

The leader of Montenegros opposition URA movement, Dritan Abazovic, told BIRN that Kocijancics appeal will not convince his party to return to the legislature.

We in the Balkans understand the position of Brussels and developed EU countries that dont have problems with democracy, but at the same time I call on EU representatives to see it from our perspective, and even see their responsibility for why there is no democratic spirit in the Balkans, Abazovic said.

He listed alleged election fraud, pressures on voters and media in the country as the main reasons for the continued boycott.

The demands of people in Belgrade, Podgorica and Tirana are to defend the fundamental values of the EU and common sense, so if they [EU representatives] dont see that, they have a problem with their own values, Abazovic added.

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