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## **CZECH REPUBLIC: THOUSANDS PROTEST REPLACEMENT OF JUSTICE MINISTER**

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Deutsche Welle (30 April 2019)

Thousands of Czechs have rallied to protest the planned appointment of the country's new justice minister. Protesters say proposed new minister Marie Benesova is too close to the current president and prime minister.

[People hold up placards which read Justice as they take part in a rally (Getty Images/M. Cizek)]

Thousands of people in Prague and across the Czech Republic have taken to the streets over the nomination of a new justice minister.

Demonstrators say Marie Benesova is too close to billionaire Prime Minister Andrej Babis, who is accused of abusing EU funds to build a luxury resort on his land in 2007.

Protesters fear the allegations may be brushed under the carpet, believing the appointment is far too convenient.

Babis is suspected of abusing funds to build the Stork's Nest resort and farm near Prague. He was charged by police in 2017.

Former Justice Minister Jan Knezinek resigned earlier this month, after police recommended that Babis be charged over the alleged scam.

President Milos Zeman, an ally of Babis, is set to name his close confidante and lawyer Besenova as justice minister on Tuesday.

Besenova is a former lawmaker with the Social Democratic CSSD party, which supports Babis in parliament.

She previously voted against a police request to strip Babis of parliamentary immunity.

Protesters carried Czech and EU flags and shouted slogans such as "Independent Justice," "We are not blind," and "We want an honest government."

### **Benesova previously held the position of justice minister, as well as chief prosecutor**

"We fear that the prime minister might escape justice," said Mikulas Minar from the Million Moments For Democracy group, which helped organize the protest on Monday, speaking with

Agence France-Presse.

Organizers said that, in addition to the protests in the capital, there were demonstrations in some 100 other towns.

### **Babis: Allegation is 'incredible filth'**

Babis is suspected of abusing funds to build the Stork's Nest resort and farm near Prague. He was charged by police in 2017, and calls the allegation against him and members of his family "incredible filth."

### **Czech Republic: The PM and fraud**

"If I weren't in politics, nobody would have heard about the Stork's Nest," Babis told the DNES broadsheet, which he owns, earlier this month. "People keep plotting affairs against me, delving into the past. This affair is 12 years old."

The 71-year-old Benesova was justice minister in a transitional government from July 2013 to January 2014, and was chief prosecutor from 1999 to 2005.

rc/cm (DPA, Reuters, AFP, AP)

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Kaynak/Source: