PROTESTS CONTINUE IN ALBANIA WITH CALLS FOR ELECTION BOYCOTT AND PRIME MINISTER RAMA TO GO

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Thousands of Albanian opposition supporters, some wearing masks of Prime Minister Edi Rama, gathered outside his offices continuing protests against his government.

Some carried banners reading "No elections without the opposition" or "Rama go".

Despite opposition unrest since mid-February, Rama, the leader of the ruling left-wing Socialist Party said he was determined that the June 30 municipal elections would go ahead.

"Elections belong to the people and no one can undermine this fundamental right for the people and the fundamental rule of our system," he said.

Centre-right opposition parties are boycotting the vote after months of demanding an early national election and accusing the government of vote-rigging and other wrongdoing.

Rama said their main goal is to disrupt the country's efforts to launch full membership negotiations with the European Union.

"It's done for this. It's done to affect and to affect it negatively. It's done to show to Europe that this country isn't stable, that this country does not deserve to be taken seriously and it's a whole plan; it's clear; it's not even secret; it's clear; it's open; it's unfolding every day, you know."

However, during Friday's demonstrations, some protestors waved US, European and German flags.

"We are asking for our rights, they (Albania's government) killed them for six years since they have been ruling," said protestor Novalik Dokaj.

Another protestor, Enver Ibraj, said:

"We came out to remove them (the government). It's a government of crime and drugs."

For the first time since the start of the rallies, nothing was thrown at the police, apparently a consequence of intensive calls from Western countries to stop the violence.

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