



By **PETER TASE**

Albania: Amidst relentless oligarchy and European Union integration

Edi Rama's Renaissance Movement of 2013 and his two years of government have proved to be disastrous for the cash-strapped nation of Albania, its Socialist Party and its loyal members. Mr. Rama's recruitment of inexperienced apprentices and corrupt loyalists have increased the level of poverty, generated skyrocketing unemployment levels and have turned Albania into a breeding ground of large weapons trafficking in collaboration with local ISIS recruitment agents (as it has been shown all over the Italian National Press). Tirana has become the European capital for impunity in public offices, drug trafficking cartels and prevailing corruption in Albania's Executive Branch; from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministries of Interior, Public Health and Finances. Moreover, Mr. Ditmir Bushati, Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Rama's principal envoy to the international community, has undertaken abroad a series of campaigns that have tarnished the good reputation and growing international popularity of Ilir Meta, the current Speaker of Albanian National Assembly. Mr. Meta has gained an admirable momentum and support from the International Community. His long experience in government and as a legislator, has enabled him to become one of a very few consistent partners, pragmatic policy makers and as someone who has been willing to work always across the aisle in order to reach political consensus on sensitive matters that affect the current Albanian political landscape and its justice system.

On the other hand Mr. Rama has embarked in multiple tours in Europe and United States to sell his paintings and pamper his art work while simultaneously carrying the hat of Albania's Prime Minister. With all of this being said, in his current visit to Washington, DC, Mr. Bushati did not cease to stain the image of Mr. Meta as a politician and a genuine deal maker. During his meetings with US Congressmen Eliot Engel and Ed Royce, with State Department Officials including Ambassador Victoria Nuland (Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs); Mr. Bushati's was focused in raising Mr. Rama's popularity and jeopardizing Mr. Meta's international reputation and domestic support among the socialist party electorate. The main focus of Rama's administration has been to defame and denigrate the well matured leadership of Ilir Meta and his political party (the Socialist Movement for Integration). In fact, Meta has emerged as a genuine leader of Albanian socialists and an authentic advocate of the middle class and a supporter of issuing a tax break to small businesses. Instead of providing distorted information on Albania's political landscape, Mr. Bushati should provide the public with an explanation on why did Albanian Foreign Ministry have to waste over US\$23 million due to his faulty decisions for firing many outstanding career diplomats (who had to pursue their illegal work termination status into the court system) and as a result the Foreign Ministry had lost every court case over the last two years and a half.

Last year Albanian diplomacy has gone through difficult times, its lack of professionalism as well as its attempts to marginalize the international ties of Albanian Finance Ministry has been at the center stage. One of these cases was the unwillingness of Albanian Ambassador in Beijing to assist the leadership of China Export Import Bank to connect the latter directly with Mr. Shkëlqim Cani, Former Albanian Minister of Finances. In 2015, it was clear to the Chinese investors that Mr. Arben Ahmetaj (former Minister of Economy and Entrepreneurship and the current Minister of Finances) was un-professional and still had not mastered the operations of Foreign Direct Investments to Albania, among many other government matters. Moreover, months later, various Albanian daily newspapers published on October 23rd, 2015, many facts that demonstrated the unwillingness of Mr. Ahmetaj to attract strategic German investors. According to a number of international investments studies undertaken by competent German Institutions; Albania has been ranked as the world's least attractive country to do business; this is due to a poor conduct of Mr. Ahmetaj who is well known in the Balkans for his luxurious once a month private-jet trips from Qatar to Hong Kong and from the beaches of Brazil to Washington DC, at the expense of Albanian tax payers.

According to Albanian daily press, Mr. Ahmetaj has been an obstacle to attract potential investments from China Development Bank and in 2014 he had refused to meet with influential leaders of Chinese real estate development industry as he was participating in an Investment

Expo in China. On February 26th, Mr. Ahmetaj, had even forgotten to shave his beard before going to take the oath of office at the swearing in ceremony in front of the President of Albania, in order to officially become the current Minister of Finances. It must be noted that Mr. Rama was absent in this important event, his absence is testimony of the very tense relations that he has provoked with Albanian president by previously making a number of intimidating phone calls and making many public derogatory comments against Albania's head of state. Albania is today the poorest country of Europe and is run by the wealthiest members of any government in Eurasia, the land of the eagles is ruled by a prime minister who came to power thanks to his deep connections with criminal factions and continues until today to be supported by the very same ordinary criminals who have even become members of the National Assembly, such as: *Armando Prenga; Arben Ndoka; Artur Bushi (former MP); Elvis Roshi (Mayor of Kruja), Koço Kokëdhima (Member of Parliament and Albania's kingpin of money laundering)*. All legislators mentioned above have allegedly participated in many illicit activities in a number of European countries and Albania.

Tirana is seriously struggling to join the European Union and continues to be ruled by very few wealthy oligarchs and an organized anarchy that has ruined its reputation in the world stage.

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