

FACT SHEET

Unjustified Allegations Against Arben Ahmetaj by the Albanian Government

Arben Ahmetaj served as a member of the Albanian Parliament and in ministerial positions, culminating in 2021 as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Reconstruction, until the Special Courts Against Corruption (SPAK) brought politically motivated charges against him and Parliament wrongfully lifted his immunity, forcing him to seek asylum abroad .

Politically Motivated and Unsubstantiated Case

Former United States federal prosecutors and public corruption investigators reviewed and wrote a report on the SPAK case against Mr. Ahmetaj, concluding: the SPAK was a **politically motivated** report, **without proper elements of a corruption charge** and **unreasonable** and **unsupported** conclusions. The Executive Summary of this report is also provided. This investigative report was funded by friends and family of Mr. Ahmetaj.

Charges Against Mr. Ahmetaj

Incinerators: SPAK alleges wrongdoing on projects to build incinerators in three Albanian cities, when, as the investigative report illustrates, **Mr. Ahmetaj had no role** in two projects and refused to approve the third, citing the Finance Minister having no jurisdiction over local funds for the project.

Real Estate: SPAK brought three unsubstantiated charges of corrupt real estate deals involving Mr. Ahmetaj, his current partner and his ex-wife, all of which are **bogus**, as defined in the report and further examined in analysis illustrating that he actually lost money on one transaction.

Travel: SPAK accuses Mr. Ahmetaj of accepting trips from a former friend, trips for which **Mr. Ahmetaj actually paid**.

Special Courts Against Corruption (SPAK)

Founded in its current form in 2019, [SPAK](#) is tasked with investigating corruption and organized crime at the highest levels of government and society in Albania. It consists of the National Bureau of Investigation, the Special Prosecutor and the Special Courts.

SPAK has prosecuted some legitimate corruption, though many high-profile cases, such as the case against Mr. Ahmetaj, illustrate that SPAK is not always the independent judicial body it purports, but also **can serve as a conduit for political prosecution** of those who fall out of favor with the political elite.

Millions of dollars invested in SPAK by the U.S. and international community are [evaluated according to metrics](#) of the number of cases prepared by SPAK, number of arrests in those cases, and seizure of property. In reality, **these metrics incentivize prosecution over the veracity of the allegations against accused individuals**. As examples, while the Albanian Constitution and laws prohibit arbitrary detention and arrest, [pretrial detentions](#) account for 52 percent of the prison population, and “some business owners, civil society activists, and politicians accused the government of selective application of the law on property seizure for political purposes.”

As the case against Mr. Ahmetaj illustrates, **transparency** and **procedures** of the anticorruption body are still **weak**. It is notable that he also remains uncharged in court.

Mr. Ahmetaj's Government Service

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance of Albania, Minister of Economic Development, Minister of State for Reconstruction, Chairman of the General Directorate of Taxation, Deputy Minister of Energy and Industry, Deputy Minister of European Integration, and coordinator for Covid. ([More](#))

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Declining Democracy in Albania

The allegations against Arben Ahmetaj speak to [declining democracy and respect for human rights](#) in Albania.

His situation provides as a case study in the ways **Albania needs to confront politically-motivated prosecutions**, especially with the country's legacy of injustice and arbitrary prosecutions under communism.

Mr. Ahmetaj believes that the U.S. and international community are correct that **justice reform** in Albania is key to improving democracy, and **fighting corruption** is imperative for the economy. But **SPAK is doing neither, when it engages in high level political prosecutions.**

Weak Albanian Judiciary

According to the [U.S. State Department](#), integrity of the judiciary and corruption were two of the most important human rights issues in 2022.

In related analysis for the same period, [Freedom House](#) notes, "**The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, but corruption remains a serious problem**, underfunded courts are subject to **political pressure** and influence, and public trust in judicial institutions is low."

There are **more than a dozen cases of politically-motivated charges** brought on, now former, high level government officials, by SPAK, and at least five of these cases including Mr. Ahmetaj's, are without substantiated claims.

Authoritarian Allegations about Prime Minister Rama

Edi Rama has been Prime Minister of Albania since 2013, presiding over governments that have been [unable to fully integrate into Europe](#) due to absence of democracy, judicial weakness, and corruption. A decade is more than enough time to achieve EU integration, if it was a priority.

In addition to allegedly using SPAK and the judicial system, writ large, to go after political adversaries, Rama has been **implicated in antidemocratic activities in the U.S.**

Rama was implicated in former U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation counterintelligence official Charles McGonigal's conviction, according to U.S. Court documents, [meeting with McGonigal](#) at least four times. These meetings were [facilitated by](#) a former Albanian intelligence officer and took place in the presence of a Rama advisor with business interests in the meetings.

At the [behest of Rama](#), McGonigal went after a U.S. lobbyist for an Albanian opposition leader.

Two Albanian-Americans were convicted of [diverting illegal foreign contributions](#) to President Obama's reelection without his knowledge, in return for a photo of Rama with the former U.S. President, a photo Rama later used in his own political campaign.

Mr. Ahmetaj's Links to the U.S. are deep

Mr. Ahmetaj was the Albania program coordinator for the **International Republican Institute**.

His first fulltime paycheck after college was from the **U.S. Department of the Treasury**, where worked with a Treasury Department official, detailed to Albania to facilitate economic reform.

He received a Masters of Arts in Diplomacy and International Commerce from the Patterson School at the **University of Kentucky**, completed a scholarship at **Georgetown University's** School of Foreign Service, and participated in the Khokalis Program at **Harvard University**.