

April 23, 2025

Dear Senator Durbin,

It is with a heavy heart that I write these lines from a local prison in Albania after being in custody without charges for almost two months and kept in inhumane conditions.

I have been detained since Feb. 10, 2025, on specious allegations of committing the offense corruption which I strongly deny. I have been forced to leave behind the city that I love and have served for 3 mandates – and am now separated from my wife and little son, as well as two widowed grandmothers!

You know my passion for Tirana – our team brought it back from hibernation. The last 10 years it has become the European Youth Capital, the European City of Sport, headed the B40 and Pact of Free Cities Networks, and is this year's Mediterranean Capital of Culture. It has been a remarkable story of development, architecture, and tourism.

Now, without any charges against me, I have been unlawfully incarcerated and prevented from fulfilling my duties as Mayor of Tirana and the Socialist Party Chair for the Region of Tirana.

This may sound surreal and bizarre, because it is. The toll on my mental and physical health is dreadful, but the point of this letter is on behalf of Tirana, Albania, and the state of democracy.

This reminds me of the old communist tactics in Albania where you irrationally target “the prey” and generate hysteria to dehumanize the target all while the target is isolated in jail without charges.

Now, these letters to friends and colleagues are my only lifeline. I seek only to be treated according to basic European standards of human rights. If this becomes the norm, any elected public official can be accused and incarcerated on trumped up charges by prosecutors with clear conflicts of interests. In my case, the lead prosecutor is hopelessly conflicted. One extraordinary example of many is that he submitted a request to modify a construction permit for his personal project that my administration refused to fully approve.

Dear friend, I ask you to help spread the word about my situation. Please write to your government, European Parliament and Commission, and non-profits that care about human rights abuses. Politicians cannot be arrested and incarcerated without charges shortly before an important national election in a free and democratic society.

Albania and Tirana have undergone enormous changes. The country is on the brink of joining the European Union. But justice reform should not be seen as a collection of “political scalps” without due process. The European Court of Human Rights already has twice this year ruled against Albania for disproportionate detention measures, considered too extreme for people who pose no risk of flight or danger to society.

So please, please be my voice. I still am the Mayor of Tirana and have to keep the city running. Please be my voice to defend human rights and the rule of law. If you could issue a statement calling for my release and for the U.S. State Department, European Parliament, or similar governmental body to look into the circumstances surrounding my unlawful detention and investigation, I would be grateful.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for anything you can do to help my city and to secure my immediate release from prison based on my unjust and inhumane incarceration.

All my love from prison in Albania!

Yours always,

Erion Veliaj

*This material is distributed by Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP on behalf of Erion and Arber Veliaj. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.*

## **Tirana Mayor Erion Veliaj – Albanian Press Coverage**

### **1. "Veliaj Was Arrested Without Evidence" – Ylli Manjani: This Is Unacceptable for Any Citizen**

By Anri Bala, *Gazeta Tema*

February 10, 2025

English translation below, see original article at <https://www.gazetatema.net/politika/veliaj-u-arrestua-pa-prova-ylli-manjani-kjo-eshte-e-papranueshme-per-cd-i479931>

\*\*\*\*\*

Invited to the show "Now," lawyer Ylli Manjani commented on the arrest of Tirana's mayor, Erion Veliaj.

Manjani described Veliaj's arrest as an unacceptable act, emphasizing that he was detained without facts or evidence, and that there are no official charges against him.

"First of all, from both the journalist's description and SPAK's announcement, it is clear that Erion Veliaj is not an indicted person. This means there are no official charges against him. What we have discussed, and I might be the only one holding this view, is that a person under investigation is not necessarily indicted. Being indicted means that the state has officially filed charges against you, and this happens when there is evidence — accusations require evidence, not just words. As of today, there are no charges against the person under investigation, which means SPAK has not yet gathered sufficient evidence to formally charge him," Manjani said.

He also called it unacceptable to keep someone in pre-trial detention without official charges, emphasizing that he has stood by this principle for 15 years.

"No one should stay in pre-trial detention for two years without charges. Not just Erion Veliaj — even if Prime Minister Rama himself were in this situation, I would say the same thing, because this applies to everyone. In a serious state, once you're indicted, you are arrested. There's no need to arrest someone just because you suspect they might tamper with evidence — you can simply suspend them from office and remove them from their workplace, but you should not arrest them," the lawyer added.

Manjani further emphasized that if SPAK had gathered evidence, they would have already sent Veliaj directly to trial. The fact that they haven't done so shows that the accusations are not strong enough to indict him.

"If SPAK had evidence, Veliaj would be formally charged and sent directly to trial. The fact that this hasn't happened means they are not ready to do so," he stated.

The lawyer added that he is against disproportionate and extreme security measures, which he sees as a bad standard in criminal justice.

"I have been, I am, and I will continue to be of this opinion, as long as we have what I believe to be a poor standard of criminal justice within the European space."

Manjani also mentioned that Veliaj could face up to 36 years in prison solely for passive corruption charges, highlighting that it is strange how these incidents happen to people affiliated with the Socialist Party.

He also pointed out that some other individuals under investigation had been kept in pre-trial detention for over three years without any concrete charges brought against them.

"One or two years in pre-trial detention is theoretically possible — one year is the average — but it can even go up to two years. However, just a few months ago, SPAK released 32 individuals because their detention deadlines had expired. They had been under investigation without trial, but had spent three years in pre-trial detention," Manjani concluded.

## 2. **Special Journalists of the Special Prosecutors! Who is intimidating whom?!**

By Anri Bala, *Gazeta Dita*

March 12, 2025

English translation below, see original article at <https://gazetadita.al/gazetaret-e-posacem-te-spak-dhe-intimidimi-i-medias/>

\*\*\*\*\*

The intimidation against justice began two days ago when anonymous media outlets of anonymous or "special" journalists published articles claiming that Erion Veliaj paid Judge Engert Pëllumbi millions of euros to be released.

Why hasn't SPAK found out who is behind these intimidating and blackmailing portals? The real intimidation of justice happens when case files are leaked into the hands of journalists before they even reach the suspects or their lawyers — journalists who then parade them in TV studios without any legal background, acting as advocates for the prosecutors.

The leaking of SPAK's files first to the media — before the concerned parties even receive them — is not the work of someone like Nesti Angoni, an anonymous figure... but the work of a prosecutor, judicial police officer, or someone inside the institution. Why isn't SPAK wiretapping and locating these leaks?

Meanwhile, the media defamation of the person under investigation, through the so-called Special Journalists, promoting the idea that the case file already contains enough evidence to convict someone, is pure intimidation of the judge — to influence them through public perception into ruling in favor of the prosecution.

Intimidation happens when there is no decision yet on Veliaj, but the Special Journalists' news claim that Appeal Judge Engert Pëllumbi was paid by the mayor in exchange for freedom. Whereas Judge Erjon Bani issued an "arrest in absentia" measure, so Veliaj only received a referral of the measure, and the Ordinary Journalists didn't have a chance to intimidate anyone (!)

It is intimidation when anyone, anywhere is wiretapped without a court decision or clear criteria, including deputies or Constitutional Court judges, and there is no serious effort to even identify a false anonymous accuser — even though such falsehood might later be exposed.

Regarding Judge Engert Pëllumbi, neither when he took the case, during, nor after yesterday's developments did we see any intimidating articles from the media outlets supporting Erion Veliaj. Only here and there, mild criticism surfaced regarding decisions on sequestration measures or the acceptance of new evidence from SPAK — with legal experts and journalists divided on whether the court has the right to accept evidence at an appeal stage for a security measure or not.

None of the prosecutors who today are complaining in court that they are being intimidated by Veliaj, had the courage to raise any objections when public accusations and threats were made by Sali Berisha — both inside the institution and outside, surrounded by TV cameras, calling them a criminal organization.

Nor when he insulted them from his balcony, nor publicly on social networks... even though these same “fearless brave prosecutors” had forbidden Berisha from doing such things. Nor have we seen any complaint from (SPAK Chief) Dumani against Ilir Meta, who told him from the courtroom: “*You’ll keep this in mind!*” — or when he publicly insulted him with heavy words and epithets like “clown,” “Dumduman,” etc.

This leads us to rightly ask:

**When and why did they find the courage to act only against Erion Veliaj?!**

The current abusers of courtrooms, with their vulgar language against defendants — guilty or innocent — now expect us, the ordinary journalists, to fall in love with them.

For their information:

**The media’s mission is to side with the victim whenever the prosecution turns into persecution.**

Erion Veliaj might be corrupt, a thief, a criminal... the scum he is called by the prosecutor, or a pathological liar surprised by the charges (!).

Veliaj might be everything the prosecution claims, but **he is not a victim of fair justice** if he is persecuted so blatantly and crudely in the courtroom, even while shackled behind bars.

It wasn’t the citizens of Tirana who turned him into a “victim” — they made him their first citizen (mayor).

It was the Special Prosecutors who did that.

Let’s hope it was only due to their madness and career ambition, and not for other, non-Albanian motives that conflict entirely with the country’s constitutional interests.

Erion Veliaj, ironically but surely, with the unprofessional and unethical behavior of the special prosecutors in the courtroom, has now secured a future favorable ruling at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

And then what will SPAK, the Special Journalists, the Nestas, and the anonymous blackmailing portals say?

Forgive me if I’m expressing myself wrongly here — maybe I’m also intimidating the Strasbourg judges into ruling in Veliaj’s favor!

Finally, someone needs to explain to the Special Prosecutors that the media is within its full duty to evaluate and weigh publicly everything they do and everything they say.

These arrogant prosecutors should forget any dreams of gagging the media with threats of handcuffs or with blackmail from their Special Journalists.

**Justice is not made in the name of Veliaj!**

Justice upholds the free speech of the media and the public’s right to opinion and stands against

the will of any prosecution invested in presuming 100% guilt in every case under investigation  
— in the name of injustice.

### 3. Erion Veliaj, Hostage of a Judiciary with Strong Political Interests

By Halit Valteri, *Gazeta Dita*

March 14, 2025

English translation below, see original article at <https://gazetadita.al/erion-veliaj-peng-i-nje-gjyqesori-me-interesa-te-forta-politike/>

\*\*\*\*\*

In Albania, the justice system has always been a subject of debate and often linked to political interests. The justice reform, supported by international partners, aimed primarily to separate politics from the judiciary and to create an independent system that would guarantee justice for all.

However, reality often shows that this process has not been easy and remains unfinished.

One of the most debated cases in this context is that of the Mayor of Tirana, Erion Veliaj, who has won consecutive mandates with broad electoral support.

There are serious concerns that he is facing a judicial system that is not entirely free from political and economic influences. In this analysis, we will examine why Erion Veliaj might be a hostage of a judiciary with strong political interests, and how this is affecting his ability to govern Tirana and implement his projects.

#### 1. Does the Albanian Justice System Still Have Ties to Politics?

Despite the justice reform and the creation of new institutions such as SPAK and the High Judicial Council, concerns remain about the full independence of the judicial system.

There are cases where court decisions and investigations by justice institutions are perceived to be influenced by political or economic interests.

If a high-profile politician like Erion Veliaj faces obstacles from the judiciary, several important questions arise:

- Is justice still being used as a tool of pressure against political figures?
- Are certain groups using judicial processes to restrict Veliaj's freedom of action?
- Is Veliaj a figure that some wish to block because he is seen as a potential future leader?

If these suspicions are true, the situation is alarming not only for Veliaj but for the entire democratic system of Albania.

#### 2. How Can a Mayor Be Obstructed Through the Judiciary?

There are several ways a politically influenced judicial system can create obstacles for a public figure like Erion Veliaj:

##### a) Opening Questionable Legal Cases

One of the most common tactics in Albanian politics is the use of the justice system to initiate

investigations or court proceedings against political opponents.

This could happen with Veliaj through:

- Fabricating suspicious charges related to tenders, urban projects, or administrative decisions.
- Using legal proceedings to keep him under political pressure.
- Prolonging trials to hinder his ability to govern freely.

If a mayor is forced to defend himself from baseless legal attacks, he loses time and energy needed to implement city projects.

#### **b) Blocking Decisions and Projects**

Another form of pressure could come through administrative courts, which could:

- Suspend major urban development projects.
- Block public investment plans.
- Annul important decisions of the Municipal Council.

In this way, Veliaj might find himself unable to implement his program, creating dissatisfaction among citizens and projecting a false image of managerial incompetence.

#### **c) Organized Media Attacks Through Judicial Processes**

Beyond the legal aspect, the opening of cases against a figure like Veliaj can also be used for propaganda purposes.

If he faces court processes, media outlets controlled by political opponents may use the situation to damage his public image.

### **3. Who Benefits from a Restricted Veliaj?**

If Erion Veliaj is facing a politicized judicial system, then who has an interest in restricting his actions?

#### **a) Political Rivals Within the Socialist Party (PS)**

As a figure with clear political ambitions, Veliaj may be seen as a threat by some within the Socialist Party.

If he gains too much independence, it could upset the party's internal balance.

In this case, some actors might be interested in keeping him under control.

#### **b) A Divided Opposition Seeking Political Attacks**

Even though Albania's opposition is fragmented, it shares a common strategy of attacking key figures of the Socialist Party.

By keeping Veliaj entangled in legal proceedings and continuous accusations, the opposition seeks to create a negative narrative around him.

### **c) Powerful Economic Groups Seeking More Control**

Tirana is a city where economic development and construction have flourished over the last decade.

If Veliaj refuses to yield ground to certain business groups, he could come under pressure from these structures through their influence on the judiciary.

#### **4. What Will Happen Next?**

If Erion Veliaj continues to be held hostage by a politically influenced judicial system, this sets a dangerous precedent for all of Albanian politics.

This situation could lead to:

- A slowed-down administration where decisions are delayed.
- Investor and developer uncertainty in the city.
- A city that fails to develop at the proper pace due to blocked projects.

The citizens of Tirana deserve governance free from these obstacles and a mayor who can implement the program they voted for.

**Conclusion: Should Justice Be Further Reformed?**

If the judiciary continues to be used as a tool to restrict politicians who are trying to govern, then justice reform must go even deeper.

Only a truly independent judiciary can ensure that political decision-making is free from pressures, and that citizens receive the services they deserve.

Albania needs independent justice, not a system used for narrow political and economic interests.

#### **4. Veliaj's Ethical Standards Toward the Prosecutor and the Prosecutor's Legal Standards Toward Veliaj**

By Mero Baze, *Gazeta Tema*

February 28, 2025

English translation below, see original article at <https://www.gazetatema.net/editorial/standardet-etike-te-veliajt-ndaj-prokurorit-dhe-standardet-ligjore-te--i482669>

\*\*\*\*\*

There is an attempt to criminalize Erion Veliaj's public battle with prosecutor Olsi Dado as a personal conflict. Indeed, Veliaj has made some excesses in his fight against Dado. For example, he heavily emphasizes how Dado became a prosecutor in 2008 with the help of Ina Rama, or what grades he received in school.

These are important facts regarding the integrity of a prosecutor, but they are not directly connected to the legal battle between them. They simply highlight the serious flaws in the system and the shortcomings of the Justice Reform, which has allowed unsuitable prosecutors into the system.

Veliaj's battle with Olsi Dado is meaningful mainly because of Dado's behavior during this process — his grave professional shortcomings, his conflict of interest, and his completely unacceptable and unprofessional language during the investigation, which resembles more a lynching than a prosecution.

It's understandable that under conditions of unjust imprisonment, Veliaj does not have the luxury to overlook Dado's personal or professional faults. But the main question remains: Is Dado behaving like a prosecutor toward Veliaj, or like a lyncher?

In fact, he is behaving like a lyncher.

From the very first day, when the video of the preliminary court hearing was published, Dado was caught speaking from his seat saying: "Will he measure himself against me? He knows where I'll send him," and later adding "filth."

All of Dado's public defenders — who are actually political opponents of Veliaj — focused on the argument that the word "filth" is not clearly heard in the recording.

And indeed, it is not clearly heard, but that does not mean he didn't say it. Let Altin Dumani and Judge Bani swear under oath that Dado did not say it, so we can also evaluate their integrity.

That word is not even heavier than the first part of Dado's statement that is clearly audible when he says, "He knows what I'll do to him," or later when he and Dumani call Veliaj "pathological."

The entire conduct during the hearing shows we are dealing with a group of nervous prosecutors who are not acting like professionals, but with hatred.

If we then gather dozens of additional details from the investigation — the pressure on summoned witnesses and, in some cases, certain perverse behaviors involving personal photographs of the individuals called in — the situation appears even more serious.

But all of this requires an investigation or testimony before an investigative committee.

The re-summoning of actor Gazmend Paja on Thursday would be enough to understand how cynical their behavior is.

Gazmend Paja was summoned two days ago and was asked why he exchanged an apartment in "Kodra e Diellit 1" for another in "Kodra e Diellit 2." There was nothing more to clarify. One of the portals that SPAK uses for the lynching of its victims complained that they failed to photograph Gazmend Paja leaving SPAK. So, they called him again yesterday just to photograph him, as they had no further questions. Paja then mocked the situation, saying he had confused his phone with the prosecutor's.

This is not just a lynching of the individual under investigation but of anyone who does not provide testimony favorable to their predetermined objective.

What is most visible, and proves that Veliaj is being subjected to a standard of persecution, is the way they are trying to keep him isolated, violating the same standards applied to others under similar security measures.

To be fair, even Berisha was placed under house arrest during the investigation phase, but none of his activities were prohibited. Besides gathering 30 people under his balcony every night and speaking to them, Berisha continued regular political activities from what could be considered his place of detention.

Albanians and foreigners, journalists, and party leadership regularly visited him — he behaved like a pandemic-era leader: isolated but not imprisoned.

The same happened with Fredi Beleri.

Anyone from any corner of Greece could visit him. Deputies, diplomats, or Greek journalists were present daily in his cell.

There was no special prison regime.

This special regime is being applied only to Erion Veliaj and Ilir Meta, against whom prosecutors seem emotionally involved because they want to appear "politically balanced" by breaking the law "on both sides."

The goal is clear: since the prosecutors have lost the battle to remain cold and professional with Veliaj, they now want him to lose his composure, curse them, and thereby "equalize" the overstepping of the law.

However, the game is unfair.

They are trying to destroy his life inside the cell, where he is powerless, while they have lost their professional integrity while enjoying full freedom and wielding all the power.

This proves that they have not behaved like prosecutors but have crossed into the role of lynchers.

And this ultimately invalidates any trial over Veliaj's "excesses," because even if they provoke anger in prosecutors, they are paid not to seek revenge, but to uphold the law.

*This material is distributed by Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP on behalf of Erion and Arber Veliaj. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.*

**Final Report of Kasowitz LLP and Mishcon de Reya  
Regarding SPAK's Unjust Detention Of  
A Democratically Elected Mayor In The Capital Of Albania:  
Erion Veliaj**

**June 24, 2025**

*This material is distributed by Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP on behalf of Erion and Arber Veliaj. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.*

## I. Introduction

Alastair Campbell, former strategist and spokesperson for British Prime Minister Tony Blair, recently wrote:

*The European Union must not look the other way. If the accession process means anything, it must uphold the values on which the Union is built: **due process, judicial integrity, human rights**. No official, regardless of status, should be immune from investigation. **But no citizen – however prominent – should be held without charge or outside legal procedure. Not in a democracy. Not in a country aspiring to join Europe.***<sup>1</sup>

Since February 10, 2025, Mayor Erion Veliaj has been unlawfully detained by the Albanian authorities. His continued detention without charge, and effective isolation at a prison known as IVEP Durrës during the national election campaign period, violates the European Convention of Human Rights (“ECHR”) and runs contrary to traditional constitutional and statutory due process principles in the United States and Europe.

The arrest and detention without formal charges of the current mayor of Tirana, Albania’s capital city, not only violates Mayor Veliaj’s personal rights and has interfered with his duties to govern as mayor, but exposes the broader weaknesses of Albania’s quest to combat corruption. Indeed, as Dorian Matlia, Albanian lawyer and activist, recently wrote:

*In Albania, they throw you in jail first, then collect the evidence. Detention is indefinite, and then another problem arises—if someone has been locked up for too long, and no major evidence emerges, the court still convicts them just to justify the time they spent in prison. The outcome is decided from the start.*<sup>2</sup>

## II. Factual Background

Erion Veliaj is the current Mayor of Tirana. He was first elected mayor in June 2015 and has since been re-elected twice in 2019 and 2023. Under Mayor Veliaj’s leadership, Tirana has seen significant reforms in infrastructure, public works and law enforcement. For example, he has introduced several sustainability initiatives, including the creation of green spaces (including a project to plant millions of trees), the promotion of environmentally friendly transportation options, “car free” days, and a project to reduce the use of plastic bags. He also has overseen projects improving Tirana’s livability and aesthetics, including the renovation of Skanderberg Square as a pedestrian-friendly public area, the upgrading of municipal infrastructure, sidewalks and bike paths, and the construction of new kindergartens and playgrounds. He has encouraged and enhanced transparency and accountability in local governance, including by creating an app which contains a database of public works and services – the first of its kind in Albania. These projects, among others, have revitalized Tirana, allowing the city to host the European Union-

<sup>1</sup> Alastair Campbell: *What’s Happening with Tirana Mayor Erion Veliaj Should Concern Us All*, NOA Albanian News Agency (May 30, 2025), <https://noa.al/lajmi/2025/05/2512096.html> (emphasis added).

<sup>2</sup> *Lawyer launches blistering criticism of SPAK practices after winning Strasbourg case on unjust detention*, Albanian Times (February 27, 2025), <https://albaniantimes.al/lawyer-launches-blistering-criticism-of-spak-practices-after-winning-strasbourg-case-on-unjust-detention/>.

---

Western Balkans summit (the first non-European Union city to do so) and the Giro d'Italia, and bringing numerous awards and accolades to the municipality. He has been integral to the improvement in Albania's reputation internationally.

In July 2023, the Special Prosecutors Office ('SPO'), contained within the Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Structure ('SPAK'),<sup>3</sup> received an anonymous one-page complaint relating to Mayor Veliaj from a fictitious individual, who falsely identified himself as Nesti Angoni, a name that does not appear in the Albania civil registry. The document is composed of unsubstantiated rumors and innuendo rather than credible and detailed criminal allegations, and should not have been sufficient to justify launching an investigation. As the investigation developed, the SPO appears to have undertaken an exceedingly broad inquiry into nearly two decades of Mayor Veliaj's life, raising concerns of prosecutorial overreach.

Despite being under investigation since July 2023, it wasn't until February 10, 2025—three months before the national parliamentary elections—that SPAK detained Mayor Veliaj without charge and under conditions that prevent him from carrying out his responsibilities as mayor and prevented him from participating in the national campaign. On February 9, 2025, SPAK imposed the personal security measure of Arrest in Prison pursuant to Article 238 of the Criminal Procedure Code on Mayor Veliaj. The next day, February 10, 2025, the judicial police detained Mayor Veliaj on the basis that he was "suspected" of committing corruption and money laundering offences, allegations that he categorically denies.<sup>4</sup>

Two days later, Mayor Veliaj appeared before the SPAK court. During that session, Mayor Veliaj's defense attorneys requested the maximum time to familiarize themselves with the 26,400 pages of documents contained in the investigative files. The Court allowed them less than half a day to review the voluminous files. This effectively denied his counsel access to the documents that were essential to challenge the legality of his detention. Mayor Veliaj was further deprived from effectively communicating with his attorneys after SPAK placed him in a security cage throughout the initial hearing. Perhaps unsurprisingly, SPAK ordered the continued detention of Mayor Veliaj.

Shortly after, Mayor Veliaj appealed the ruling to SPAK's dedicated appellate court. During this hearing, he was again kept in a security cage, stifling his ability to communicate with his defense. Notably, the presiding judge permitted the prosecution to present new evidence collected after the court's initial ruling. The prosecution argued that this evidence, a collection of telephone call recordings between Mayor Veliaj and his family, constituted obstruction of justice.<sup>5</sup> Yet these

---

<sup>3</sup> SPAK is a specialized court and prosecution structure independent of the legacy Albanian judiciary, with a unique focus on political corruption and organized crime. It was created to curtail the pervasive corruption as a necessary component of Albania's efforts to join the European Union. Article 135(2) of the Albanian constitution gives SPAK jurisdiction over cases involving corruption, organized crime, and charges against high-level governmental officials, including the president, prime minister, judges and members of the High Judicial Council and High Prosecutorial Council. See Ivan Gunjic, *Albania's Special Courts against Corruption and Organised Crime*, U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Center 3-4 (2022), <https://www.u4.no/publications/albanias-special-courts-against-corruption-and-organised-crime.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Nen Si, *Erion Veliaj files appeal to Supreme Court, seeks release from prison*, EuroNews Albania (19-09-2025 15:55), <https://euronews.al/en/erion-veliaj-files-appeal-to-supreme-court-seeks-release-from-prison/#:~:text=The%20Mayor%20of%20Tirana%2C%20Erion,of%20corruption%20and%20money%20laundering>

<sup>5</sup> See Appellate Opinion.

phone intercepts were either unrelated to the case, or merely demonstrated Mayor Veliaj's (entirely proper) efforts to proclaim his innocence. These recordings also were leaked to the media along with photographs of Mayor Veliaj in the security cage. The SPAK appeals court upheld Mayor Veliaj's continued detention on March 13, 2025.<sup>6</sup>

The Supreme Court of Albania is expected to hear and consider Mayor Veliaj's formal appeal of the lower court's decisions to detain him without charges.

### III. Concerns and Criticisms of SPAK

While the creation of an independent judiciary dedicated to rooting out corruption was no doubt well-intentioned, SPAK has faced significant criticism since its inception. For instance, SPAK has been routinely criticized for its lack of oversight and accountability.<sup>7</sup> As one commentator noted, SPAK, like the rest of the Albanian judiciary, "works in a highly politicized environment, where power structures in politics have historically impacted the judiciary. In a country with a fragile rule of law and a history of judicial corruption, the independence of SPAK is under constant pressure from political forces that even try to interfere in investigations and prosecutions."<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the central body responsible for overseeing SPO prosecutors, the High Council of Prosecution, is itself particularly prone to interference, without facing the same restrictions as the SPO personnel themselves (who are subject to periodic monitoring of their telecommunications).<sup>9</sup>

SPAK's investigation against Mayor Veliaj appears to have involved political and personal conflicts of interest. Prior to the SPO's investigation, a member of the prosecution team reportedly submitted a request to Mayor Veliaj's administration to modify a construction permit for personal property. That request was denied by the mayor's administration.<sup>10</sup> And now, the SPO is not only investigating Mayor Veliaj, but also other competing real estate developers as targets of this investigation – creating a strong appearance of impropriety and a conflict of interest. But of all the targets of this investigation, Mayor Veliaj is the only one that is currently detained.

Some of SPAK's practices—most notably, the propensity for the SPO to request, and the courts to grant, lengthy pretrial detention of high-profile defendants based on mere suspicion—have proven highly questionable. In February 2025, the European Court on Human Rights (the "Strasbourg Court") heard *Gëllçi v. Albania*, a case brought by Thoma Gëllçi, the former director of Albania's national broadcaster, against the government, alleging that his rights were violated when he was detained by SPAK for nearly eight months before trial.<sup>11</sup> Gëllçi was arrested by SPAK in October 2021 and remained in prison until his conviction in June 2022.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> Adela Kusuri, *The journey of SPAK: A comprehensive analysis of its achievements and challenges*, 9 European Journal of Economics, Law and Social Sciences 70, 73, 76 (2015).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at 76.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Editorial Note: Erion Veliaj case becomes political thriller as SPAK faces growing backlash*, Albanian Times (February 15, 2025), <https://albaniantimes.al/veliaj-case-spak-legal-scrutiny/>.

<sup>11</sup> *Gëllçi v. Albania*, no. 15468/23, §§ 1-11, 25 February 2025.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*, §§ 6-11.

The Strasbourg Court held that whilst “persistence of a reasonable suspicion is a condition *sine qua non* for the validity of a pre-trial detention, [] after a certain lapse of time it no longer suffices” and a court must have “other grounds” to “continue to justify the deprivation of liberty.”<sup>13</sup> In Gëllçi’s case, the SPO and SPAK court simply “referred to the need for obtaining additional evidence as a ground for the applicant’s prolonged detention” and generally contended that the defendant would tamper with evidence and intimidate witnesses (because he was “familiar with” them) but (a) “failed to specify the concrete pieces of evidence that were still to be collected as well as to explain why those pieces of evidence could not have been collected at an earlier stage of the investigation”; (b) did not respond to Gëllçi’s argument that the suspicion was based on documents already seized by SPAK; and (c) did not have any “concrete factual evidence or any indication of actual attempts by [Gëllçi] to engage in tampering with the evidence.”<sup>14</sup> With respect to the risk of flight, the Strasbourg Court credited Gëllçi’s argument that he had already left Albania and returned despite the known specter of impending investigation and arrest, found that this argument had not been “duly weighted” by the SPAK courts in light of his other family and community ties within Albania, and criticized SPAK’s refusal to consider “alternative security measures” “beyond a mere formal statement.”<sup>15</sup> The Strasbourg Court accordingly found that SPAK had violated Article 5 § 3 of the Convention and awarded costs to Gëllçi.<sup>16</sup>

Gëllçi’s case highlighted a potential trend in SPAK cases. As his lawyer, Dorian Matlia, explained, SPAK “create[s] the image that it is working by throwing people behind bars” in a form of “repressive justice.”<sup>17</sup> Mr. Matlia accused SPAK of “putting on a televised show” by selectively leaking case files to the media and argued that “[t]his is not how justice works in a country that wants to join the EU.”<sup>18</sup> Others have echoed these concerns, with media reports decrying a “troubling pattern” of SPAK turning “high-profile arrests into a form of public spectacle,” focusing on “dramatic arrest[s] that generate media headlines” rather than on “adhering to European legal standards.”<sup>19</sup>

#### IV. U.S. Legal Principles

SPAK’s continued detention of Mayor Veliaj without charges is an anathema to fundamental principles of justice in the United States. Detaining an individual who has not been charged for any period longer than reasonably necessary for the prosecutors to decide whether to release him or bring formal charges violates fundamental due process.<sup>20</sup> The United States Supreme Court has long recognized that in most cases federal law “unequivocally provide[s] that a person arrested for a non-capital offense shall be admitted to bail. This traditional right to freedom before conviction permits the unhampered preparation of a defense, and serves to prevent the infliction of

---

<sup>13</sup> Gëllçi, § 19.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*, § 23.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*, §§ 24-25.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*, §§ 28-32.

<sup>17</sup> *Lawyer launches blistering criticism*, *supra* n. 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

*A legal and moral Victory against unjust detention in Albania*, Tirana Times (Feb. 25, 2025), <https://www.tiranatimes.com/a-legal-and-moral-victory-against-unjust-detention-in-albania/>

<sup>20</sup> 16C C.J.S. Constitutional Law § 1629.

punishment prior to conviction.”<sup>21</sup> This right is tightly bound to the “axiomatic and elementary” principle of “the presumption of innocence”<sup>22</sup> and without it, “the presumption of innocence, secured only after centuries of struggle, would lose its meaning.”<sup>23</sup> This right also is encompassed within the right to due process—courts have held that where the deprivation of liberty, or the conditions of that deprivation, amount to a “punishment” before an “adjudication of guilt,” they violate the detainee’s substantive due process rights,<sup>24</sup> and where the detainee is held without meaningful opportunity to be heard, it implicates his procedural due process rights.<sup>25</sup>

The Bail Reform Act, 18 U.S.C. §§ 3141 et seq., enacted in 1984, “codified . . . the traditional presumption favoring pretrial release for the majority of Federal defendants.”<sup>26</sup> Pursuant to the Act, a criminal defendant cannot be detained pending trial “unless the release will present a risk of flight or danger, or both, and no set of conditions can reasonably protect against those risks.”<sup>27</sup> Relevant factors in making these determinations include:

*(1) the nature and circumstances of the offense charged, including whether the offense is a crime of violence, a violation of [the federal statute criminalizing sex trafficking], a Federal crime of terrorism, or involves a minor victim or a controlled substance, firearm, explosive, or destructive device;*

*(2) the weight of the evidence against the person;*

*(3) the history and characteristics of the person, including--*

*(A) the person's character, physical and mental condition, family ties, employment, financial resources, length of residence in the community, community ties, past conduct, history relating to drug or alcohol abuse, criminal history, and record concerning appearance at court proceedings; and*

---

<sup>21</sup> *Stack v. Boyle*, 342 U.S. 1, 4 (1951); *see also id.*, at 7-8 (Jackson, J., concurring) (“The practice of admission to bail, as it has evolved in Anglo-American law, is not a device for keeping persons in jail upon mere accusation until it is found convenient to give them a trial. On the contrary, the spirit of the procedure is to enable them to stay out of jail until a trial has found them guilty. Without this conditional privilege, even those wrongly accused are punished by a period of imprisonment while awaiting trial and are handicapped in consulting counsel, searching for evidence and witnesses, and preparing a defense.”).

<sup>22</sup> *Nelson v. Colorado*, 581 U.S. 128, 135–36 (2017).

<sup>23</sup> *Stack*, 342 U.S. at 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Bell v. Wolfish*, 441 U.S. 520, 535-36 (1979); *Lopez-Valenzuela v. Arpaio*, 770 F.3d 772, 791 (9th Cir. 2014) (finding state statute which “categorically denies bail or other pretrial release and thus requires pretrial detention for every undocumented immigrant charged with any of a broad range of felonies, regardless of the seriousness of the offense or the individual circumstances of the arrestee, including the arrestee’s strong ties to and deep roots in the community” would violate substantive due process).

<sup>25</sup> *See Torres v. Collins*, 2023 WL 6166523, at \*9-11 (E.D. Tenn. Sept. 21, 2023) (finding bail practices which did not give defendants “opportunity to be heard in a meaningful manner” would violate procedural due process).

<sup>26</sup> *United States v. Berrios-Berrios*, 791 F.2d 246, 250 (2d Cir. 1986) (citation omitted).

<sup>27</sup> *United States v. Ermin*, 710 F. Supp. 3d 163, 175 (W.D.N.Y. 2024), *aff’d*, No. 24-138, 2024 WL 1652240 (2d Cir. Feb. 21, 2024); *see Bell*, 441 U.S. at 536 (1979) (denial of bail appropriate “to ensure [the defendant’s] presence at trial”); *United States v. Salerno*, 481 U.S. 739, 747 (1987) (denial of bail appropriate or to “prevent[] danger to the community”).

*(B) whether, at the time of the current offense or arrest, the person was on probation, on parole, or on other release pending trial, sentencing, appeal, or completion of sentence for an offense under Federal, State, or local law; and*

*(4) the nature and seriousness of the danger to any person or the community that would be posed by the person's release. . . .*<sup>28</sup>

Under these standards, pretrial detention of a white collar defendant with significant community responsibilities in the relevant jurisdiction, such as Mayor Veliaj, is improper.<sup>29</sup> With respect to the risk of flight, courts have regularly found that criminal defendants do not pose a risk of flight where, as in Mayor Veliaj's case, they 'have households, children and significant financial interests in' the relevant jurisdiction or 'are visible, well-known public figures who could not easily go into hiding.'<sup>30</sup> Courts also consider a defendant's awareness of impending charges and decision *not* to abscond despite having the opportunity to do so.<sup>31</sup> All of these factors heavily weigh in Mayor Veliaj's favor—he is a visible, prominent figure in Albania with a wife, young child, and home in Tirana, and despite knowing about the investigation prior to his arrest, he has returned to Albania after having travelled abroad on official trips on multiple occasions.

## V. European Legal Principles

Mayor Veliaj's detention violates a number of central precepts of European law. As a member of the Council of Europe and party to the European Convention on Human Rights ("ECHR"), Albania must protect its citizens from arbitrary detention, ensure they receive a fair trial, and where individuals are detained, guarantee humane detention conditions. There are serious grounds for concern that, in Mayor Veliaj's case, these requirements have not been met and as a result, his ECHR rights have been violated.

### ECHR Article 3

Article 3 of the ECHR prohibits "inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." Mayor Veliaj is currently being detained in near-solitary conditions in IVEP Durrës, and international counsel has been denied access to him, raising concerns regarding his rights under Article 3. Albanian prisons have been the subject of serious and sustained criticism, including by the Committee for

<sup>28</sup> 18 U.S.C. § 3142(g).

<sup>29</sup> *See, e.g., United States v. Giordano*, 370 F. Supp. 2d 1256, 1270-72 (S.D. Fla. 2005) (holding pretrial detention not warranted where (i) charges were non-violent economic fraud; (ii) defendant's family and community ties outweighed showing that he had financial resources to flee; (iii) defendant would likely not face "lifelong sentence" and would face longer sentence if he jumped bail; (iv) defendant's family ties outside the country were "not lifelong family ties"; (v) any danger to the community could be ameliorated by an order precluding him from engaging in investment activity and (vi) "monetary conditions" would secure the defendant's appearance at court).

<sup>30</sup> *In re Extradition of Chapman*, 459 F. Supp. 2d 1024, 1027 (D. Haw. 2006); *see also United States v. Autry*, 2018 WL 1598677, at \*1 (W.D. Tex. Apr. 2, 2018) (finding strong community ties precluded detention).

<sup>31</sup> *United States v. Hammond*, 204 F. Supp. 2d 1157, 1166 (E.D. Wis. 2002) ("One year before his arrest ATF agents advised defendant that he was facing charges, and he did not abscond. This is strong evidence that defendant is not inclined to flee."); *United States v. Digiacoimo*, 746 F. Supp. 1176, 1189 (D. Mass. 1990) ("If he did not flee in the three years prior to his indictment, the court does not expect he will flee after his brother pledges his home and the home which belonged to his mother in order to assure his appearance at future court proceedings."); *United States v. McIndoo*, 2016 WL 5092637, at \*12 (W.D.N.Y. Sept. 19, 2016)

the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the U.S. State Department, and Amnesty International, for systemic issues including severe overcrowding, poor physical conditions and inadequate medical care.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, an extremely high percentage of the Albanian prison population is on remand, which is particularly troubling in the context of Mr. Veliaj's case.<sup>33</sup> Unless or until Mayor Veliaj's international counsel are permitted to visit him at IVEP Durrës, it is very difficult to assess the extent to which his Article 3 rights may be being violated.

#### ECHR Article 5

Article 5 guarantees “the right to liberty and security” and prohibits the deprivation of liberty except in certain cases by lawful procedure. While Article 5 § 1(c) provides for “the lawful arrest or detention” of a person arrested upon reasonable suspicion of having committed a crime where that detention is “effectuated for the purpose of bringing him before the competent legal authority” or “when it is reasonably considered necessary to prevent his committing an offence or fleeing,” the Article also demands that the arrestee be entitled either to a prompt trial or “release pending trial,” which can be guaranteed by conditions (Article 5 § 3), and that anyone so deprived of liberty be allowed to challenge the lawfulness of their detention in pretrial proceedings and have their challenge be “decided speedily by a court and his release ordered if the detention is not lawful” (Article 5 § 4).

In Mayor Veliaj's case, there are serious concerns that his detention is arbitrary, and in no way necessary, proportionate, or reasonable. The Albanian authorities have consistently failed to present a pressing public interest justifying his ongoing detention, in direct contravention of decisions by the Strasbourg Court,<sup>34</sup> in several ways.

First, to justify continued pretrial detention, there must be a persistent reasonable suspicion that the detainee committed the offense at issue, and accordingly, Mayor Veliaj must be given an opportunity to *effectively* challenge the basis of the allegations against him.<sup>35</sup> But while the Strasbourg Court has held that such proceedings must be adversarial with “equality of arms” between the parties, Mr. Veliaj's lawyers were allowed less than half a day to inspect a 26,400 page case file (accumulated over a 20-month investigation), before arguing his pretrial detention hearing in the SPAK court on February 12, 2025. In effect, this denied his lawyers true access to his case file and violated Article 5 § 4 of the ECHR.<sup>36</sup>

Second, after a lapse of a certain period of time, the persistence of a reasonable suspicion no longer suffices to justify continued detention; rather, the national authorities must establish with “special diligence” whether other “relevant” and “sufficient” grounds continue to justify the deprivation of liberty.<sup>37</sup> Such relevant and sufficient justifications include: (i) the danger of absconding; (ii) the

---

*Council of Europe anti-torture Committee (CPT) publishes report on Albania*, European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) (12/01/2024), <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cpt/-/council-of-europe-anti-torture-committee-cpt-publishes-report-on-albania.-1>.

<sup>33</sup> World Prison Brief, Albania, <https://www.prisonstudies.org/country/albania> (last visited June 6, 2025).

<sup>34</sup> *See Merabishvili v. Georgia* [GC] 2017 § 234.

<sup>35</sup> *Turcan v. Moldova* 2007 §§ 67 to 70.

<sup>36</sup> *Zarakolu v Turkey* 2020 §§ 59-61.

<sup>37</sup> *Idalov v. Russia* [GC] 2012 § 140; *Buzadji v. Moldova* [GC] 2016, § 87.

risk of pressure being brought to bear on witnesses or evidence being tampered with; and (iii) the risk of reoffending.<sup>38</sup> Here, the SPAK court made superficial and misconceived findings about these justifications, whilst failing to properly consider them. In determining whether there was a risk Mayor Veliaj would abscond, the SPAK court was required to consider his character and morals, his home life and family ties, and his occupation, assets and other links to Albania,<sup>39</sup> but failed to sufficiently address these pertinent factors, ignoring his responsibilities as Mayor of Tirana, his good character, his high-profile position and his strong family ties to the Tirana community. The SPAK court failed to point to any evidence of connections or assets outside Albania which might suggest a risk of flight. The court also disregarded the fact that, even after being informed of the investigation and probable arrest, Mayor Veliaj twice traveled outside Albania and returned, demonstrating his intention to remain in Albania and defend the charges against him.

One of the SPAK court's justifications for Mayor Veliaj's continued detention was the risk of interference with witnesses, which the court found upon supposed evidence that, in December 2024, Mayor Veliaj's wife had attempted to interfere with a potential witness. In so finding, the court ignored the position of the Strasbourg Court, that the risks alleged of disruption to the investigation naturally diminish with the passing of time as statements are taken and lines of inquiry are concluded.<sup>40</sup> The court also demonstrated a suspect double-standard, justifying Veliaj's detention upon one alleged attempt of witness interference by a co-defendant whose own actions were not considered serious enough to warrant her own detention. This cannot be considered a consideration "sufficient" to justify Mayor Veliaj. There was no evidence presented in the proceeding to support a risk of commission of further offences. Such evidence would need to establish a plausible danger, and the measures imposed to prevent the danger must be appropriate based on "the circumstances of the case and in particular the past history and personality of the person concerned."<sup>41</sup> But rather than establish a plausible danger by resort to proper evidence, the SPAK court of appeal relied on general and abstract comparisons to cases of other defendants accused of similar defenses, which is contrary to the well-established principle requiring arguments against release to be supported by specific facts and personal circumstances of the defendant.<sup>42</sup>

Contrary to Strasbourg case law applying Article 5, including the decision in Gëllçi, referenced above, the SPAK courts also failed to meaningfully consider alternatives to detention such as house arrest, surrender of travel documents, or police reporting.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, during pre-trial detention hearings, the court repeatedly maintained that, in denying the offences, Mr Veliaj has "*failed to show remorse*" and "*denied any responsibility for his offending.*" It appears that the court equated denial of an offence with evidence of guilt, the clearest possible indication that it had disregarded the presumption of innocence in conducting its assessment as to whether Mr Veliaj ought to be released from pre-trial detention.<sup>44</sup> This evidence of the denial

---

<sup>38</sup> *Buzadji* § 88.

<sup>39</sup> *Sulaoja v. Estonia* 2005 § 64.

<sup>40</sup> *Clooth v. Belgium* 1991 §§ 43-44.

<sup>41</sup> *Id.* § 40.

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*; *Boicenco v. Moldova* 2006 § 142; *Perstner v. Luxembourg* 2023 § 33; *Labita v. Italy* 1995 § 163.

<sup>43</sup> *S, V and A v. Denmark* [GC] 2018 § 161.

<sup>44</sup> *Buzadji* §§ 89-91.

of the presumption of innocence may indicate a lack of personal impartiality on the part of the first instance court.

#### EHCR Article 6

Under Article 6, every criminal suspect is “entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law” (Article 6 § 1), is “presumed innocent until proved guilty” (§ 2) and is guaranteed “adequate time and facilities for the preparation of his defense” (§ 3(b)). There are indications that Mayor Veliaj is being denied these rights.

First, as mentioned, the SPAK courts have already violated § 2 by commenting in pretrial proceedings on Mayor Veliaj’s purported failure to show remorse or accept responsibility in denying release, projecting a clear presumption of guilt, rather than innocence. Such open hostility towards a defendant is a strong factor in determining a court’s improper partiality and attendant denial of a fair trial.<sup>45</sup>

Second, as noted above, in litigating his pretrial detention in February, Mayor Veliaj’s local counsel were effectively denied access to the investigation file, giving rise to grave concerns regarding the “equality of arms” at any future trial.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, during these pretrial proceedings, Mayor Veliaj was placed in a security cage, an arrangement usually made for high-risk, violent defendants.<sup>47</sup> As a result, he was unable to communicate with his lawyers during the hearings. There is no reason to believe he will not be made to do so in future proceedings, including trial.

#### EHCR Article 34

Article 34 of the EHCR concerns access to the Strasbourg Court and makes clear that the “High Contracting Parties”—including Albania— “undertake not to hinder in any way the effective exercise of” the right of a purported victim of an EHCR violation to apply for relief from the Court.

Mayor Veliaj’s right to apply for such relief has been violated. International counsel has been denied access to him multiple times on transparently misconceived grounds, including that they are not qualified to practice Albanian law or were not specifically licensed in EU jurisdictions. Accordingly, Mayor Veliaj’s international counsel has been limited in their ability to properly assess the conditions of his detention or take instructions with a view to applying to the Strasbourg Court for relief. The Strasbourg Court has found that denial of access to a defendant’s representatives on nearly identical grounds can violate that defendant’s Article 34 right of petition.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> *Buscemi v. Italy*, 1999 §§ 67-68.

<sup>46</sup> *Niderost-Huber v. Switzerland* 1997 § 23.

<sup>47</sup> A photo of Mayor Veliaj in this security cage was leaked to the press. Because only SPAK employees are allowed to have their mobile telephones at these hearings, it is almost certainly the case that the photograph was improperly taken and shared deliberately by SPAK personnel, raising even more concerns of impropriety and bias by the entire SPAK structure.

<sup>48</sup> *Zakharin v. Russia* 2010 §§ 157-160.

EHCR Article 3 of Additional Protocol

Article 3 of Additional Protocol 1 protects the right to free and fair elections, providing that the contracting parties “undertake to hold free elections at reasonable intervals by secret ballot, under conditions which will ensure the free expression of the opinion of the people in the choice of the legislature” and “guarantee[] the right of every elected representative to exercise his or her mandate.” While the Additional Protocol and the case law applying it<sup>49</sup> may not *directly* apply to Mayor Veliaj (as the protection afforded applies to the legislature, rather than members of the executive) the relevant principles are instructive as to the overall assessment of the legality of his detention, given that he is a democratically elected holder of public office, known to be of good character, with a mandate to serve the public interest in Tirana. There is no evidence that the SPAK courts in this case have considered Mayor Veliaj’s ability to carry out his public mandate when assessing whether his detention is necessary, proportionate and reasonable.

\* \* \*

For all of the foregoing reasons, Mayor Veliaj’s detention violates Western, constitutional, and statutory principles of due process, and Mayor Veliaj should immediately be released. Should he be released, Mayor Veliaj is eager to immediately resume his duties as the democratically elected Mayor of Tirana.

---

<sup>49</sup> See, e.g., *Selahattin Demirtaş v. Turkey* 2020 §§ 395-396.

**Mayor Erion Veliaj:**  
**Unlawful Incarceration and the Threat to Albanian Democracy**

**Tirana Mayor Erion Veliaj has been unlawfully incarcerated for over 4 months (since February 10) despite not having been charged with any crime. The timing and circumstances of his prolonged detention are politically motivated, directly harm U.S. interests, and threaten democracy and the rule of law in Albania, an important NATO ally.**

- Mayor Veliaj's continued unlawful incarceration without charge is a **grave violation of human rights** that directly threatens the rule of law and democratic elections in Albania.
- **Erion's case was brought by Albania's Special Anti-Corruption Structure and Organized Crime Structure (SPAK)**, a specialized prosecutor's office, court, and law enforcement agency focused on prosecuting corruption and organized crime.
- **His investigation, arrest, and incarceration are politically motivated.** The investigation began in July 2023, and he remains uncharged nearly two years later. He was incarcerated shortly before the upcoming national elections May 11.
- This abuse of power adversely affects the United States due to **the significant role the U.S. played in setting up the SPAK court and special prosecutor office** involved.
- Albania's ongoing European Union ascension process and other attempts to strengthen western alliances are threatened, **heightening potential Russian and Chinese influence.**

Now is a critical time for leaders like Senator Booker to counter antidemocratic forces that jeopardize all the tremendous work and resources the U.S. has invested in fighting Albanian corruption and promoting the rule of law.

**We hope to gain Senator Booker's support for Erion and Albania. We believe his voice on this matter could have a tremendous impact. *We respectfully request a very brief and general public statement condemning the incarceration of Mayor Veliaj since early February without any criminal charges and seeking his release. Ideally the statement would call for an investigation into the role of SPAK in his case and incarceration.***

**Mayor Erion Veliaj Background**

- Erion has served as Tirana's Mayor since 2015, democratically elected 3 times, most recently in 2023. His wife and 6-year-old son are home while he sits in prison.
- He is a member of the centrist "Socialist" Party, the current parliamentary majority.
- He has long advocated for judicial reform, including SPAK itself.
- Tirana is the capital and largest city in Albania, home to approximately 1.2 million people. Tirana makes up about half of Albania's total population of 2.4 million.
- The Mayor of Tirana is a national figure and often a stepstone to national leadership.
- Erion's continued incarceration prevents him from serving his constituents and fulfilling his duties as Mayor.
- As mayor, Erion is also the Chairman of the Socialist Party in Tirana, which had central campaign responsibilities related to the recent May 11 national elections.

### **The Albanian Justice System's Failures Directly Impact U.S. Interests**

- SPAK was created in 2019 to demonstrate Albania's commitment to countering corruption in accordance with European Union (EU) and American standards.
- **The U.S. was integral in developing SPAK and training its prosecutors and judges. The U.S. assisted and trained SPAK through the Justice Department's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training (OPDAT), along with additional funding via the State and Defense Departments.**
- **Therefore, this flagrant abuse of power enabled by OPDAT undermines U.S. efforts and investments in the rule of law and to fight corruption, contrary to U.S. interests.**
- Additional information on U.S. investments and activities in Albania is available [here](#).
- Albania is seeking ascension to the EU and closer western ties. The EU has made a more robust, independent judiciary a clear requirement for ascension.
- Failure to ascend to the EU or develop closer western ties leaves a tremendous vacuum for U.S. adversaries, namely Russia and China, to exploit a more vulnerable Albania and increase their malign influence in Europe.

### **Erion Veliaj's Continued Incarceration is Wrong and Politically Motivated**

- Erion came under investigation in July 2023 via an anonymous tip from a fake person, but **it was not until 572 days later—a year and 7 months—that he was incarcerated.**
- Investigators collected evidence, interviewed Erion and his wife (and many others), and seized electronic communications, but **still not did not bring a single charge.**
- Instead, he was jailed just weeks before national elections **without any charges.**
- **SPAK has precluded Erion from even meeting with his international counsel in clear violation of the European Convention on Human Rights.**
- He is incarcerated in a facility that houses violent criminals.
- He has lost twice in seeking to be released from prison pending charges or a trial. His appeal to Albania's highest court will be heard sometime in June (within three weeks).

### **The SPAK Personnel Involved in Erion's Case are Clearly Conflicted**

- Erion's SPAK investigation is led by conflicted prosecutor Ols Dado.
- **Dado is an active member of the authoritarian opposition Democratic Party**, which is led by former PM Sali Berisha, himself barred from entering the U.S. and U.K. Berisha and the Democratic Party are hoping to seize power in the upcoming elections.
- **Dado is also a property developer in Tirana.** He submitted a request to the mayor's office to modify a construction permit on property he owned, which was denied. Extraordinarily, he is now **brazenly investigating Erion as well as competing developers** that had permits approved in Tirana. There is no evidence of foul play in the approvals or denials. **Erion is the only person under investigation to be incarcerated.**
- SPAK judges are assigned on a rotating basis. SPAK appears to have **ensured Erion's case was assigned to a judge with known ties to the opposition Democratic Party.**

*This material is distributed by Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP on behalf of Erion and Arber Veliaj. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.*

**Mayor Erion Veliaj:**  
**Unlawful Incarceration and the Threat to Albanian Democracy**

**Tirana Mayor Erion Veliaj has been unlawfully incarcerated for over 4 months (since February 10) despite not having been charged with any crime. The timing and circumstances of his prolonged detention are politically motivated, directly harm U.S. interests, and threaten democracy and the rule of law in Albania, an important NATO ally.**

- Mayor Veliaj's continued unlawful incarceration without charge is a **grave violation of human rights** that directly threatens the rule of law and democratic elections in Albania.
- **Erion's case was brought by Albania's Special Anti-Corruption Structure and Organized Crime Structure (SPAK)**, a specialized prosecutor's office, court, and law enforcement agency focused on prosecuting corruption and organized crime.
- **His investigation, arrest, and incarceration are politically motivated.** The investigation began in July 2023, and he remains uncharged nearly two years later. He was incarcerated shortly before recent national elections May 11.
- This abuse of power adversely affects the United States due to **the significant role the U.S. played in setting up the SPAK court and special prosecutor office** involved.
- Albania's ongoing European Union ascension process and other attempts to strengthen western alliances are threatened, **heightening potential Russian and Chinese influence.**

Now is a critical time for leaders like Chairman Risch to counter antidemocratic forces that jeopardize all the tremendous work and resources the U.S. has invested in fighting Albanian corruption, promoting the rule of law, and strengthening NATO against malign influence.

**We hope to gain Chairman Risch's support for Erion and Albania. We believe his voice on this matter would have a tremendous impact. *We respectfully request a brief and general public statement call for an investigation into the role of SPAK in his case and incarceration. Such a statement would ideally condemn the incarceration of Mayor Veliaj since early February without any criminal charges and seek his release.***

**Mayor Erion Veliaj Background**

- Erion has served as Tirana's Mayor since 2015, democratically elected 3 times, most recently in 2023. His wife and 6-year-old son are home while he sits in prison.
- He is a member of the centrist "Socialist" Party, the current parliamentary majority.
- He has long advocated for judicial reform, including SPAK itself.
- Tirana is the capital and largest city in Albania, home to approximately 1.2 million people. Tirana makes up about half of Albania's total population of 2.4 million.
- The Mayor of Tirana is a national figure and often a stepstone to national leadership.
- Erion's continued incarceration prevents him from serving his constituents and fulfilling his duties as Mayor.
- As mayor, Erion is also the Chairman of the centrist "Socialist" Party in Tirana, which had central campaign responsibilities related to the recent May 11 national elections.

### **The Albanian Justice System's Failures Directly Impact U.S. Interests**

- SPAK was created in 2019 to demonstrate Albania's commitment to countering corruption in accordance with European Union (EU) and American standards.
- **The U.S. was integral in developing SPAK and training its prosecutors and judges. The U.S. assisted and trained SPAK through the Justice Department's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training (OPDAT), along with additional funding via the State and Defense Departments.**
- **Therefore, this flagrant abuse of power enabled by OPDAT undermines U.S. efforts and investments in the rule of law and to fight corruption, contrary to U.S. interests.**
- Additional information on U.S. investments and activities in Albania is available [here](#).
- Albania is seeking ascension to the EU and closer western ties. The EU has made a more robust, independent judiciary a clear requirement for ascension.
- Failure to ascend to the EU or develop closer western ties leaves a tremendous vacuum for U.S. adversaries, namely Russia and China, to exploit a more vulnerable Albania and increase their malign influence in Europe.

### **Erion Veliaj's Continued Incarceration is Wrong and Politically Motivated**

- Erion came under investigation in July 2023 via an anonymous tip from a fake person, but **it was not until 572 days later—a year and 7 months—that he was incarcerated.**
- Investigators collected evidence, interviewed Erion and his wife (and many others), and seized electronic communications, but **still not did not bring a single charge.**
- Instead, he was jailed just weeks before national elections **without any charges.**
- **SPAK has precluded Erion from even meeting with his international counsel in clear violation of the European Convention on Human Rights.**
- He is incarcerated in a facility that houses violent criminals.
- He has lost twice in seeking to be released from prison pending charges or a trial. His appeal to Albania's highest court will be heard sometime in June 2025.

### **The SPAK Personnel Involved in Erion's Case are Clearly Conflicted**

- Erion's SPAK investigation is led by conflicted prosecutor Ols Dado.
- **Dado is an active member of the authoritarian opposition Democratic Party**, which is led by former PM Sali Berisha, himself barred from entering the U.S. and U.K. Berisha and the Democratic Party are hoping to seize power in the upcoming elections.
- **Dado is also a property developer in Tirana.** He submitted a request to the mayor's office to modify a construction permit on property he owned, which was denied. Extraordinarily, he is now **brazenly investigating Erion as well as competing developers** that had permits approved in Tirana. There is no evidence of foul play in the approvals or denials. **Erion is the only person under investigation to be incarcerated.**
- SPAK judges are assigned on a rotating basis. SPAK appears to have **ensured Erion's case was assigned to a judge with known ties to the opposition Democratic Party.**

*This material is distributed by Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP on behalf of Erion and Arber Veliaj. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.*

**Mayor Erion Veliaj:**  
**Unlawful Incarceration and the Threat to Albanian Democracy**

**Tirana Mayor Erion Veliaj has been unlawfully incarcerated for over 4 months (since February 10) despite not having been charged with any crime. The timing and circumstances of his prolonged detention are politically motivated, directly harm U.S. interests, and threaten democracy and the rule of law in Albania, an important NATO ally.**

- Mayor Veliaj's continued unlawful incarceration without charge is a **grave violation of human rights** that directly threatens the rule of law and democratic elections in Albania.
- **Erion's case was brought by Albania's Special Anti-Corruption Structure and Organized Crime Structure (SPAK)**, a specialized prosecutor's office, court, and law enforcement agency focused on prosecuting corruption and organized crime.
- **His investigation, arrest, and continued incarceration are politically motivated.** The investigation began in July 2023, and he remains uncharged nearly two years later. He was incarcerated shortly before recent national elections May 11.
- This abuse of power adversely affects the United States due to **the significant role the U.S. played in setting up the SPAK court and special prosecutor office** involved.
- Albania's ongoing European Union ascension process and other attempts to strengthen western alliances are threatened, **heightening potential Russian and Chinese influence.**

Now is a critical time for leaders like Rep. Aderholt to counter antidemocratic forces that jeopardize all the tremendous work and resources the U.S. has invested in fighting Albanian corruption, promoting the rule of law, and strengthening NATO against malign influence.

**We hope to gain Rep. Aderholt's support for Erion and Albania. We believe his voice on this matter would have a tremendous impact. *We respectfully request a brief and general public statement calling for an investigation into the role of SPAK in his case and incarceration. Such a statement would ideally condemn the incarceration of Mayor Veliaj since early February without any criminal charges and seek his release.***

**Mayor Erion Veliaj Background**

- Erion has served as Tirana's Mayor since 2015, democratically elected 3 times, most recently in 2023. His wife and 6-year-old son are home while he sits in prison.
- He is a member of the centrist "Socialist" Party, the current parliamentary majority.
- He has long advocated for judicial reform, including SPAK itself.
- Tirana is the capital and largest city in Albania, home to approximately 1.2 million people. Tirana makes up about half of Albania's total population of 2.4 million.
- The Mayor of Tirana is a national figure and often a stepstone to national leadership.
- Erion's continued incarceration prevents him from serving his constituents and fulfilling his duties as Mayor.
- As mayor, Erion is also the Chairman of the centrist "Socialist" Party in Tirana, which had central campaign responsibilities related to the recent May 11 national elections.

### **The Albanian Justice System's Failures Directly Impact U.S. Interests**

- SPAK was created in 2019 to demonstrate Albania's commitment to countering corruption in accordance with European Union (EU) and American standards.
- **The U.S. was integral in developing SPAK and training its prosecutors and judges. The U.S. assisted and trained SPAK through the Justice Department's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training (OPDAT), along with additional funding via the State and Defense Departments.**
- **Therefore, this flagrant abuse of power enabled by OPDAT undermines U.S. efforts and investments in the rule of law and to fight corruption, contrary to U.S. interests.**
- Additional information on U.S. investments and activities in Albania is available [here](#).
- Albania is seeking ascension to the EU and closer western ties. The EU has made a more robust, independent judiciary a clear requirement for ascension.
- Failure to ascend to the EU or develop closer western ties leaves a tremendous vacuum for U.S. adversaries, namely Russia and China, to exploit a more vulnerable Albania and increase their malign influence in Europe.

### **Erion Veliaj's Continued Incarceration is Wrong and Politically Motivated**

- Erion came under investigation in July 2023 via an anonymous tip from a fake person, but **it was not until 572 days later—a year and 7 months—that he was incarcerated.**
- Investigators collected evidence, interviewed Erion and his wife (and many others), and seized electronic communications, but **still not did not bring a single charge.**
- Instead, he was jailed just weeks before national elections **without any charges.**
- **SPAK has precluded Erion from even meeting with his international counsel in clear violation of the European Convention on Human Rights.**
- He is incarcerated in a facility that houses violent criminals.
- He has lost twice in seeking to be released from prison pending charges or a trial. His appeal to Albania's highest court will be heard sometime this month (June 2025).

### **The SPAK Personnel Involved in Erion's Case are Clearly Conflicted**

- Erion's SPAK investigation is led by conflicted prosecutor Ols Dado.
- **Dado is an active member of the authoritarian opposition Democratic Party**, which is led by former PM Sali Berisha, himself barred from entering the U.S. and U.K. Berisha and the Democratic Party had hoped to seize power in the recent elections.
- **Dado is also a property developer in Tirana.** He submitted a request to the mayor's office to modify a construction permit on property he owned, which was denied. Extraordinarily, he is now **brazenly investigating Erion as well as competing developers** that had permits approved in Tirana. There is no evidence of foul play in the approvals or denials. **Erion is the only person under investigation to be incarcerated.**
- SPAK judges are assigned on a rotating basis. SPAK appears to have **ensured Erion's case was assigned to a judge with known ties to the opposition Democratic Party.**

*This material is distributed by Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP on behalf of Erion and Arber Veliaj. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.*

**Mayor Erion Veliaj:**  
**Unlawful Incarceration and the Threat to Albanian Democracy**

**Tirana Mayor Erion Veliaj has been unlawfully incarcerated for nearly 3 months (since February 10) despite not having been charged with any crime. The timing and circumstances of his prolonged detention are politically motivated, directly harm U.S. interests, and threaten democracy and the rule of law in Albania, an important NATO ally.**

- Mayor Veliaj's continued unlawful incarceration without charge is a **grave violation of human rights** that directly threatens the rule of law and democratic elections in Albania.
- **Erion's case was brought by Albania's Special Anti-Corruption Structure and Organized Crime Structure (SPAK)**, a specialized prosecutor's office, court, and law enforcement agency focused on prosecuting corruption and organized crime.
- **His investigation, arrest, and incarceration are politically motivated.** The investigation began in July 2023, and he remains uncharged nearly two years later. He was incarcerated shortly before the upcoming national elections May 11.
- This abuse of power adversely affects the United States due to **the significant role the U.S. played in setting up the SPAK court and special prosecutor office** involved.
- Albania's ongoing European Union ascension process and other attempts to strengthen western alliances are threatened, **heightening potential Russian and Chinese influence.**

Now is a critical time for leaders to continue speaking out against forces that put democracy at risk and jeopardize all of the tremendous work and resources the U.S. has invested in fighting Albanian corruption.

**We hope to gain Senator Cornyn's support for Erion and Albania. We believe his voice on this matter could have a tremendous impact. *We respectfully request that Senator Cornyn please issue a very brief and general public statement condemning the incarceration of Mayor Veliaj since early February without any criminal charges, supporting his immediate release, and calling for an investigation into his incarceration by the US State Department and Department of Justice into the role of the SPAK in his case.***

**Mayor Erion Veliaj Background**

- Erion has served as Tirana's Mayor since 2015, democratically elected 3 times, most recently in 2023. His wife and 6-year-old son are home while he sits in prison.
- He is a member of the centrist "Socialist" Party, the current parliamentary majority.
- He has long advocated for judicial reform, including SPAK itself.
- Tirana is the capital and largest city in Albania, home to approximately 1.2 million people. Tirana makes up about half of Albania's total population of 2.4 million.
- The Mayor of Tirana is a national figure and often a stepstone to national leadership.
- As mayor, Erion is also the Chairman of the Socialist Party in Tirana, which has central campaign responsibilities related to the upcoming May 11 national elections.

**The Albanian Justice System's Failures Directly Impact U.S. Interests**

- SPAK was created in 2019 to demonstrate Albania's commitment to countering corruption in accordance with European Union (EU) and American standards.

- **The U.S. was integral in developing SPAK and training its prosecutors and judges. The U.S. continues to assist and train SPAK through the Justice Department's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training (OPDAT), along with funding via the State and Defense Departments.**
- **Therefore, this flagrant abuse of power enabled by OPDAT undermines U.S. efforts and investments in the rule of law and to fight corruption, contrary to U.S. interests.**
- Additional information on U.S. investments and activities in Albania is available [here](#).
- Albania is seeking ascension to the EU and closer western ties. The EU has made a more robust, independent judiciary a clear requirement for ascension.
- Failure to ascend to the EU or develop closer western ties leaves a tremendous vacuum for U.S. adversaries, namely Russia and China, to exploit a more vulnerable Albania and increase their malign influence in Europe.

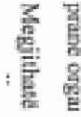
### **Erion Veliaj's Continued Incarceration is Wrong and Politically Motivated**

- Erion came under investigation in July 2023 via an anonymous tip from a fake person, but **it was not until 572 days later—a year and 7 months—that he was incarcerated.**
- Investigators collected evidence, interviewed Erion and his wife (and many others), and seized electronic communications, but **still not did not bring a single charge.**
- Instead, he was jailed just weeks before national elections **without any charges.**
- He is incarcerated in a facility that houses violent criminals.
- He has lost twice in seeking to be released from prison pending charges or a trial. His appeal to Albania's highest court will be heard sometime in May or June.

### **The SPAK Personnel Involved in Erion's Case are Clearly Conflicted**

- Erion's SPAK investigation is led by conflicted prosecutor Ols Dado.
- **Dado is an active member of the authoritarian opposition Democratic Party**, which is led by former PM Sali Berisha, himself barred from entering the U.S. and U.K. Berisha and the Democratic Party are hoping to seize power in the upcoming elections.
- **Dado is also a property developer in Tirana.** He submitted a request to the mayor's office to modify a construction permit on property he owned, which was denied. Extraordinarily, he is now **brazenly investigating Erion as well as competing developers** that had permits approved in Tirana. There is no evidence of foul play in the approvals or denials. **Erion is the only person under investigation to be incarcerated.**
- SPAK judges are assigned on a rotating basis. SPAK appears to have **ensured Erion's case was assigned to a judge with known ties to the opposition Democratic Party.**

*This material is distributed by Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP on behalf of Erion and Arber Veliaj. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.*



REPUBLIKA E SHQIPËRISË

SPECIAL PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE AGAINST CORRUPTION AND ORGANIZED CRIME

No.15572 prot./O.D.

Tirana, on 06.05.2025

Subject: Return Reply

Ms. Av. Celia MARR

Address: Celia.Marr@Mishcon.com

Dear Madam,

At the Special Prosecutor's Office against Corruption and Organized Crime, in the post office of the info@spak.gov.al institution, has received a request from you, Av. Celia Marr Celia.Marr@Mishcon.com, me lenden "Mr. Erion Veliaj-Visitation Request [MDR-MISHCON\_LIVE. FID610595]", which was recorded under number 15176, dated 02.05.2025.

Referring to the above, it is found that you, as well as lawyers Ben Brandon, Daniel Fetterman and Joshua Roberts, in the capacity of counsel, requests the conduct of a legal visit to the ECI Durrës, with the person under investigation Erion Veliaj. On your part, it is also known that the power of attorney of representation signed by the latter, notarized, will arrive at a second moment at the proceeding body.

However, a copy of the cooperation agreement was sent along with the request with the law firm "Rakipi & Partners" shpk, copies of the certificates of exercise of activity as legal counsel/lawyer for foreign nationals Ben Brandon and Celia Marr, as well as copies of relevant registration certificates as attorneys for Daniel Fetterman and Joshua Roberts. These certificates are issued by the authorities of England and Wales respectively, as well as state of New York, USA.

Regarding this request, given that in the present case it is a matter of exercising the activity of a foreign lawyer in the Albanian territory, the provisions of law no. 55/2018 "On the profession of lawyer in the Republic of Albania", which in Article 23, paragraph 1 of provides that "He has the right to practice the profession of lawyer in the Republic of Albania and any Albanian or foreign citizen who has obtained the title of lawyer in a member state of European Union, according to the rules of that member state and has signed a contract cooperation with a law firm in the Republic of Albania, recognized and registered as such in the Chamber of Advocates of Albania and in the tax authorities".

Address: "Jordan Misja" Street No.1, Tirana,  
Albania

Website:  
www.spak.gov.al

Given the fact that the lawyers' certificates attached to the request, are issued in countries not Member States of the European Union, the above-mentioned lawyers cannot be legitimized as defense counsel of the citizen under investigation Erion Veliaj, in the framework of criminal proceedings no. 27/2024 of Special Prosecutor's Office against Corruption and Organized Crime.

Secondly, referring to Article 48, paragraph 1, of Law no. 7905 dt. 21.03.1995, "Code of Criminal Procedure", amended, which provides that "The defendant has the right to choose no more than two defender", it is found that there is also another legal obstacle to the approval of the request Your. In this regard, we inform you that the citizen under investigation Erion Veliaj has already chosen 2 defense counsel, who until this moment have assisted both the Special Prosecutor's Office and the Special Prosecutor's Office also in court hearings held at the Special Court of First Instance/Appeal on Corruption and Organized Crime. This fact constitutes a legal obstacle for the body proceedings to legitimize the presence of other counsel.

For the above reasons, we inform you that your request to conduct a legal visit to the ECI Durrës, in the quality of the defenders, with the citizen under investigation Erion Veliaj, cannot be approved.

Thanking you for your understanding,



HEAD OF PROSECUTION Altin Dumani  
BY ORDER AND BY DELEGATION THE PROSECUTOR OF THE CASE Ols Dado  
theWestME KUNDAKISSO  
TYRANT

Address: "Jordan Misja" Street No.1, Tirana,  
Albania

Website:  
[www.spak.gov.al](http://www.spak.gov.al)

**KASOWITZ BENSON TORRES LLP**

**Mishcon de Reya**

1633 Broadway  
New York, NY 10019  
T: +1 (212) 506-1700  
www.kasowitz.com

Africa House  
70 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6AH  
DX 37954 Kingsway  
T: +44 20 3321 7000  
www.mishcon.com

**FAO: Prosecutors Mr Altin Dumani and  
Mr Ols Dado**

Special Anti-Corruption and Organized  
Crime Structure (SPAK)  
Rruga Jordan Misja, Nr 1,  
Tiranë 1000,  
Shqipëri

8 May 2025

**BY EMAIL ([INFO@SPAK.GOV.AL](mailto:INFO@SPAK.GOV.AL))**

Dear Sirs

**Mr Erion Veliaj - Visitation Request**

We refer to your letter of 6 May 2025 refusing permission to lawyers Ben Brandon and Celia Marr of Mishcon and Daniel Fetterman and Joshua Roberts of Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP to conduct a legal visit with Erion Veliaj at IEVP Durrës.

Regrettably, your refusal of permission is predicated on a misunderstanding of the nature of and grounds for the proposed legal visit, which was clearly set out in our letter of 2 May 2025. As that letter makes abundantly clear, Mishcon and Kasowitz have been appointed by Mr Veliaj to represent him before the European Court of Human Rights, and other international tribunals and dispute resolution procedures, not before the domestic courts in Albania. It follows that none of the lawyers from Mishcon or Kasowitz who wish to visit Mr Veliaj will be practising law or purporting to practice law in Albania. Accordingly, Article 23 § 1 of Law No. 55/2018 "*On the Profession of Lawyer in the Republic of Albania*" is of no application.

You will no doubt be aware of Article 34 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which provides:

*"The Court may receive applications from any person, non-governmental organisation or group of individuals claiming to be the victim of a violation by one of the High Contracting Parties of the rights set forth in the Convention or the Protocols thereto. The High Contracting Parties undertake not to hinder in any way the effective exercise of this right." [emphasis added]*

In its case law on Article 34, the Strasbourg Court has found in a number of cases that measures limiting an applicant's contact with his representatives may constitute an interference with an applicant's right of individual petition to the Court. The Strasbourg Court has found a violation of Article 34 where the applicant's

**KASOWITZ BENSON TORRES LLP**

**Mishcon de Reya**

representative before the Court, who was not admitted to a local bar nor qualified to practice law, was refused access to her client in custody: *Zakharin v Russia* 1555/04 10 June 2010 at §157 to §160.

The fact that none of the lawyers who wish to visit Mr Veliaj practise law in a member state of the European Union is also irrelevant to the request. As above, none of the lawyers included in the request intend to practice or purport to practice law in Albania or exercise rights of audience before an Albanian court. As you will be aware, as the UK is a member of the Council of Europe and a party to the Convention, lawyers qualified to practice in England & Wales are entitled to exercise rights of audience before the European Court of Human Rights. The fact that the UK is no longer a member of the EU is irrelevant to the exercise of that right.

Finally, the fact that two local, Albanian lawyers have been appointed to represent Mr Veliaj is nothing to the point, as before, the international counsel whose application for permission to visit Mr Veliaj was set out in our letter of 2 May 2025 are not his 'defence counsel' in the domestic proceedings before any Albanian court, including the Special Court of First Instance or Court of Appeal on Corruption or Organised Crime. Your purported reliance on Article 48 § 1 of *the Code of Criminal Procedure* (Law No. 7905 dated 21 March 1995) is therefore equally misconceived.

We have made every effort to satisfy you that we are authorised to act for Mr Veliaj by providing a notarised Powers of Attorney and a co-operation agreement with local counsel which makes it abundantly clear that we are appointed to represent Mr Veliaj before international, not local courts and tribunals. In doing so, we have sought to be open and transparent and act in compliance with local law, in the expectation that our reasonable request would be considered appropriately, in a spirit of cooperation and with proper regard to Mr Veliaj's rights of access to counsel guaranteed by international law.

It is disappointing to note that our reasonable request for access has been refused on such a self-evidently misconceived basis. We would be grateful if you would revisit your decision, in the event that any confusion about the basis of and purpose for our proposed visit has arisen.

We would be grateful for a response by **5pm on 9 May 2025**.

Yours faithfully

*Mishcon de Reya LLP*

**Mishcon de Reya LLP**

Direct Tel: +44 (0)20 3321 7171

Email: ben.brandon@mishcon.com

*Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP*

**Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP**

Direct Tel: +1 (212) 506-1934

Email: dfetterman@kasowitz.com

**Mayor Erion Veliaj:**  
**Unlawful Incarceration and the Threat to Albanian Democracy**

**Tirana Mayor Erion Veliaj has been unlawfully incarcerated for well over 100 days months (since February 10) despite not having been charged with any crime. The timing and circumstances of his prolonged detention are politically motivated, directly harm U.S. interests, and threaten democracy and the rule of law in Albania, an important NATO ally.**

- Mayor Veliaj's continued unlawful incarceration without charge is a **grave violation of human rights** that directly threatens the rule of law and democratic elections in Albania.
- **Erion's case was brought by Albania's Special Anti-Corruption Structure and Organized Crime Structure (SPAK)**, a specialized prosecutor's office, court, and law enforcement agency focused on prosecuting corruption and organized crime.
- **His investigation, arrest, and incarceration are politically motivated.** The investigation began in July 2023, and he remains uncharged nearly two years later. He was incarcerated shortly before the upcoming national elections May 11.
- This abuse of power adversely affects the United States due to **the significant role the U.S. played in setting up the SPAK court and special prosecutor office** involved.
- Albania's ongoing European Union ascension process and other attempts to strengthen western alliances are threatened, **heightening potential Russian and Chinese influence.**

Now is a critical time for leaders like Rep. Himes and the Albanian Issues Caucus to counter antidemocratic forces that jeopardize all the tremendous work and resources the U.S. has invested in fighting Albanian corruption and promoting the rule of law.

**We hope to gain Rep. Himes' support for Erion and Albania. We believe his voice on this matter could have a tremendous impact. *We respectfully request a very brief and general public statement condemning the incarceration of Mayor Veliaj since early February without any criminal charges and seeking his release. Ideally the statement would call for an investigation into the role of SPAK in his case and incarceration.***

**Mayor Erion Veliaj Background**

- Erion has served as Tirana's Mayor since 2015, democratically elected 3 times, most recently in 2023. His wife and 6-year-old son are home while he sits in prison.
- He is a member of the centrist "Socialist" Party, the current parliamentary majority.
- He has long advocated for judicial reform, including SPAK itself.
- Tirana is the capital and largest city in Albania, home to approximately 1.2 million people. Tirana makes up about half of Albania's total population of 2.4 million.
- The Mayor of Tirana is a national figure and often a stepstone to national leadership.
- Erion's continued incarceration prevents him from serving his constituents and fulfilling his duties as Mayor.
- As mayor, Erion is also the Chairman of the Socialist Party in Tirana, which had central campaign responsibilities related to the recent May 11 national elections.

### **The Albanian Justice System's Failures Directly Impact U.S. Interests**

- SPAK was created in 2019 to demonstrate Albania's commitment to countering corruption in accordance with European Union (EU) and American standards.
- **The U.S. was integral in developing SPAK and training its prosecutors and judges. The U.S. continues to assist and train SPAK through the Justice Department's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training (OPDAT), along with funding via the State and Defense Departments.**
- **Therefore, this flagrant abuse of power enabled by OPDAT undermines U.S. efforts and investments in the rule of law and to fight corruption, contrary to U.S. interests.**
- Additional information on U.S. investments and activities in Albania is available [here](#).
- Albania is seeking ascension to the EU and closer western ties. The EU has made a more robust, independent judiciary a clear requirement for ascension.
- Failure to ascend to the EU or develop closer western ties leaves a tremendous vacuum for U.S. adversaries, namely Russia and China, to exploit a more vulnerable Albania and increase their malign influence in Europe.

### **Erion Veliaj's Continued Incarceration is Wrong and Politically Motivated**

- Erion came under investigation in July 2023 via an anonymous tip from a fake person, but **it was not until 572 days later—a year and 7 months—that he was incarcerated.**
- Investigators collected evidence, interviewed Erion and his wife (and many others), and seized electronic communications, but **still not did not bring a single charge.**
- Instead, he was jailed just weeks before national elections **without any charges.**
- He is incarcerated in a facility that houses violent criminals.
- He has lost twice in seeking to be released from prison pending charges or a trial. His appeal to Albania's highest court will be heard sometime in June (within three weeks).

### **The SPAK Personnel Involved in Erion's Case are Clearly Conflicted**

- Erion's SPAK investigation is led by conflicted prosecutor Ols Dado.
- **Dado is an active member of the authoritarian opposition Democratic Party**, which is led by former PM Sali Berisha, himself barred from entering the U.S. and U.K. Berisha and the Democratic Party are hoping to seize power in the upcoming elections.
- **Dado is also a property developer in Tirana.** He submitted a request to the mayor's office to modify a construction permit on property he owned, which was denied. Extraordinarily, he is now **brazenly investigating Erion as well as competing developers** that had permits approved in Tirana. There is no evidence of foul play in the approvals or denials. **Erion is the only person under investigation to be incarcerated.**
- SPAK judges are assigned on a rotating basis. SPAK appears to have **ensured Erion's case was assigned to a judge with known ties to the opposition Democratic Party.**

*This material is distributed by Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP on behalf of Erion and Arber Veliaj. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.*

**Mayor Erion Veliaj:**  
**Unlawful Incarceration and the Threat to Albanian Democracy**

**Tirana Mayor Erion Veliaj has been unlawfully incarcerated for well over 100 days months (since February 10) despite not having been charged with any crime. The timing and circumstances of his prolonged detention are politically motivated, directly harm U.S. interests, and threaten democracy and the rule of law in Albania, an important NATO ally.**

- Mayor Veliaj's continued unlawful incarceration without charge is a **grave violation of human rights** that directly threatens the rule of law and democratic elections in Albania.
- **Erion's case was brought by Albania's Special Anti-Corruption Structure and Organized Crime Structure (SPAK)**, a specialized prosecutor's office, court, and law enforcement agency focused on prosecuting corruption and organized crime.
- **His investigation, arrest, and incarceration are politically motivated.** The investigation began in July 2023, and he remains uncharged nearly two years later. He was incarcerated shortly before the upcoming national elections May 11.
- This abuse of power adversely affects the United States due to **the significant role the U.S. played in setting up the SPAK court and special prosecutor office** involved.
- Albania's ongoing European Union ascension process and other attempts to strengthen western alliances are threatened, **heightening potential Russian and Chinese influence.**

Now is a critical time for leaders like Rep. Keating to take action and speak out against antidemocratic forces that jeopardize all the tremendous work and resources the U.S. has invested in fighting Albanian corruption and promoting the rule of law.

**We hope to gain Rep. Keating's support for Erion and Albania. We believe his voice on this matter could have a tremendous impact. *We respectfully request that Rep. Keating please issue a brief and general public statement condemning the incarceration of Mayor Veliaj since early February without any criminal charges and seeking his release. Ideally the statement would call for an investigation into the role of SPAK in his case and incarceration.***

**Mayor Erion Veliaj Background**

- Erion has served as Tirana's Mayor since 2015, democratically elected 3 times, most recently in 2023. His wife and 6-year-old son are home while he sits in prison.
- He is a member of the centrist "Socialist" Party, the current parliamentary majority that has made EU ascension by 2030 its top priority.
- He has long advocated for judicial reform, including SPAK itself.
- Tirana is the capital and largest city in Albania, home to approximately 1.2 million people. Tirana makes up about half of Albania's total population of 2.4 million.
- The Mayor of Tirana is a national figure and often a stepstone to national leadership.
- Erion's continued unlawful incarceration prevents him from serving his constituents and fulfilling his duties as Mayor.
- As mayor, Erion is also the Chairman of the Socialist Party in Tirana, which had central campaign responsibilities related to the recent May 11 national elections.

### **The Albanian Justice System's Failures Directly Impact U.S. Interests**

- SPAK was created in 2019 to demonstrate Albania's commitment to countering corruption in accordance with European Union (EU) and American standards.
- **The U.S. was integral in developing SPAK and training its prosecutors and judges. The U.S. continues to assist and train SPAK through the Justice Department's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training (OPDAT), along with funding via the State and Defense Departments.**
- **Therefore, this flagrant abuse of power enabled by OPDAT undermines U.S. efforts and investments in the rule of law and to fight corruption, contrary to U.S. interests.**
- Additional information on U.S. investments and activities in Albania is available [here](#).
- Albania is seeking ascension to the EU and closer western ties. The EU has made a more robust, independent judiciary the top requirement for ascension.
- Failure to ascend to the EU or develop closer western ties leaves a tremendous vacuum for U.S. adversaries, namely **Russia and China, to exploit a more vulnerable Albania and increase their malign influence in Europe.**

### **Erion Veliaj's Continued Incarceration is Wrong and Politically Motivated**

- Erion came under investigation in July 2023 via an anonymous tip from a fake person, but **it was not until 572 days later—a year and 7 months—that he was incarcerated.**
- Investigators collected evidence, interviewed Erion and his wife (and many others), and seized electronic communications, but **still not did not bring a single charge.**
- Instead, he was **jailed just weeks before national elections without any charges.**
- He is incarcerated in a facility that houses violent criminals.
- **SPAK has repeatedly denied international counsel from even meeting with Erion.**
- He has lost twice on appeal in Albanian court seeking to be released from prison pending charges or a trial.
- **His final appeal of his unlawful incarceration to Albania's highest court will be heard sometime in June (within three weeks).**

### **The SPAK Personnel Involved in Erion's Case are Clearly Conflicted**

- Erion's SPAK investigation is led by conflicted prosecutor Ols Dado.
- **Dado is an active member of the authoritarian opposition Democratic Party**, which is led by former PM Sali Berisha, himself sanctioned and barred from entering the U.S. and U.K. Berisha and the Democratic Party worked to seize power in the recent May 11 national elections.
- **Dado is also a property developer in Tirana.** He submitted a request to the mayor's office to modify a construction permit on property he owned, which was denied. Extraordinarily, he is now **brazenly investigating Erion as well as competing developers** that had permits approved in Tirana. There is no evidence of foul play in the approvals or denials. **Erion is the only person under investigation to be incarcerated.**
- SPAK judges are assigned on a rotating basis. SPAK appears to have **ensured Erion's case was assigned to a judge with known ties to the opposition Democratic Party.**

*This material is distributed by Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP on behalf of Erion and Arber Veliaj. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.*

**Mayor Erion Veliaj:**  
**Unlawful Incarceration and the Threat to Albanian Democracy**

**Tirana Mayor Erion Veliaj has been unlawfully incarcerated for well over 100 days months (since February 10) despite not having been charged with any crime. The timing and circumstances of his prolonged detention are politically motivated, directly harm U.S. interests, and threaten democracy and the rule of law in Albania, an important NATO ally.**

- Mayor Veliaj's continued unlawful incarceration without charge is a **grave violation of human rights** that directly threatens the rule of law and democratic elections in Albania.
- **Erion's case was brought by Albania's Special Anti-Corruption Structure and Organized Crime Structure (SPAK)**, a specialized prosecutor's office, court, and law enforcement agency focused on prosecuting corruption and organized crime.
- **His investigation, arrest, and incarceration are politically motivated.** The investigation began in July 2023, and he remains uncharged nearly two years later. He was incarcerated shortly before the upcoming national elections May 11.
- This abuse of power adversely affects the United States due to **the significant role the U.S. played in setting up the SPAK court and special prosecutor office** involved.
- Albania's ongoing European Union ascension process and other attempts to strengthen western alliances are threatened, **heightening potential Russian and Chinese influence.**

Now is a critical time for leaders like Rep. Morelle and the Albanian Issues Caucus to speak out against antidemocratic forces that jeopardize all the tremendous work and resources the U.S. has invested in fighting Albanian corruption and promoting the rule of law.

**We hope to gain Rep. Morelle's support for Erion and Albania. We believe his voice on this matter could have a tremendous impact. *We respectfully request that Rep. Morelle please issue a brief and general public statement condemning the incarceration of Mayor Veliaj since early February without any criminal charges and seeking his release. Ideally the statement would call for an investigation into the role of SPAK in his case and incarceration.***

**Mayor Erion Veliaj Background**

- Erion has served as Tirana's Mayor since 2015, democratically elected 3 times, most recently in 2023. His wife and 6-year-old son are home while he sits in prison.
- He is a member of the centrist "Socialist" Party, the current parliamentary majority that has made EU ascension by 2030 its top priority.
- He has long advocated for judicial reform, including SPAK itself.
- Tirana is the capital and largest city in Albania, home to approximately 1.2 million people. Tirana makes up about half of Albania's total population of 2.4 million.
- The Mayor of Tirana is a national figure and often a stepstone to national leadership.
- Erion's continued unlawful incarceration prevents him from serving his constituents and fulfilling his duties as Mayor.
- As mayor, Erion is also the Chairman of the Socialist Party in Tirana, which had central campaign responsibilities related to the recent May 11 national elections.

### **The Albanian Justice System's Failures Directly Impact U.S. Interests**

- SPAK was created in 2019 to demonstrate Albania's commitment to countering corruption in accordance with European Union (EU) and American standards.
- **The U.S. was integral in developing SPAK and training its prosecutors and judges. The U.S. continues to assist and train SPAK through the Justice Department's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training (OPDAT), along with funding via the State and Defense Departments.**
- **Therefore, this flagrant abuse of power enabled by OPDAT undermines U.S. efforts and investments in the rule of law and to fight corruption, contrary to U.S. interests.**
- Additional information on U.S. investments and activities in Albania is available [here](#).
- Albania is seeking ascension to the EU and closer western ties. The EU has made a more robust, independent judiciary the top requirement for ascension.
- Failure to ascend to the EU or develop closer western ties leaves a tremendous vacuum for U.S. adversaries, namely **Russia and China, to exploit a more vulnerable Albania and increase their malign influence in Europe.**

### **Erion Veliaj's Continued Incarceration is Wrong and Politically Motivated**

- Erion came under investigation in July 2023 via an anonymous tip from a fake person, but **it was not until 572 days later—a year and 7 months—that he was incarcerated.**
- Investigators collected evidence, interviewed Erion and his wife (and many others), and seized electronic communications, but **still not did not bring a single charge.**
- Instead, he was **jailed just weeks before national elections without any charges.**
- He is incarcerated in a facility that houses violent criminals.
- **SPAK has repeatedly denied international counsel from even meeting with Erion.**
- He has lost twice on appeal in Albanian court seeking to be released from prison pending charges or a trial.
- **His final appeal of his unlawful incarceration to Albania's highest court will be heard sometime in June (within three weeks).**

### **The SPAK Personnel Involved in Erion's Case are Clearly Conflicted**

- Erion's SPAK investigation is led by conflicted prosecutor Ols Dado.
- **Dado is an active member of the authoritarian opposition Democratic Party**, which is led by former PM Sali Berisha, himself sanctioned and barred from entering the U.S. and U.K. Berisha and the Democratic Party worked to seize power in the recent May 11 national elections.
- **Dado is also a property developer in Tirana.** He submitted a request to the mayor's office to modify a construction permit on property he owned, which was denied. Extraordinarily, he is now **brazenly investigating Erion as well as competing developers** that had permits approved in Tirana. There is no evidence of foul play in the approvals or denials. **Erion is the only person under investigation to be incarcerated.**
- SPAK judges are assigned on a rotating basis. SPAK appears to have **ensured Erion's case was assigned to a judge with known ties to the opposition Democratic Party.**

*This material is distributed by Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP on behalf of Erion and Arber Veliaj. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.*