

Macedonia: Jailed Albanian Leader Freed

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Detention of a former Albanian guerrilla contravened country's amnesty law.

Macedonia's defeated nationalist government last week appeared to cave into international pressure by releasing a leading Albanian politician it had detained in what has been seen as a last vengeful act.

The interior ministry locked up Sadula Duraku, a former commander of the National Liberation Army, NLA, and now a senior member of the Democratic Union for Integration, DUI, and threatened to arrest 51 other former Albanian guerrillas for crimes committed in last year's conflict.

Following an intervention by Macedonian president Boris Trajkovski and the international community, Duraku was released on October 7, two days after his detention.

The ministry had charged Duraku with attacking a police station in the village of Matejce and commanding NLA operations in Lipkovo village during the Albanian uprising.

The arrest contravened an amnesty law, passed last March, which was a key component of the Ohrid agreement that ended the fighting.

Some politicians have criticised the episode as a desperate attempt by the outgoing nationalist VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition government - which suffered a heavy defeat in the general election on September 15 - to get back at the Albanian minority.

Interior ministry spokesman Voislav Zafirovski said Duraku had been accused of serious crimes not covered by the amnesty, even though the latter stipulated that the tribunal should deal with such charges.

After the elections, the Social Democratic Union, SDSM, became the leading Macedonian party in parliament. The majority of Albanian votes went to the DUI whose president, Ali Ahmeti, used to lead the NLA. SDSM and DUI will participate in the new government due to take over at the end of the month.

Georgievski fumed that the "bad Albanians" of DUI were not fit to take part in government and should be behind bars. But he was obliged to give way to the combined pressure of President Trajkovski and international representatives.

DUI spokesman Agron Buxhaku said Duraku clearly came under the official pardon. "Only The Hague can deal with crimes committed in last year's fighting," he said.

The Helsinki Committee in Macedonia endorsed this view. "The Duraku arrest and the threat to arrest other members of the Albanian community suspected of crimes in the 2001 conflict is a flagrant breach of the amnesty law," it said in an official statement.

The interior ministry brushed all this aside and persisted with its threat to arrest 51 other NLA members, including DUI leaders who are now parliamentary deputies, such as Ahmeti, Fazli Veliu and G'zim Ostreni.

"This is not how things are done in a law-abiding state. These are the final attempts (of the parties who lost the elections) to destabilise the country," commented Buxhaku.

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Location: Macedonia

Focus: International Criminal Tribunal for the former
Yugoslavia

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