

# Albania's "Flamingo Revolution" shakes the government

Markus Salzmann  
1 July 2026

Since late May, Albania has been convulsed by its largest protest movement since the fall of the Stalinist regime in the early 1990s. What began as local resistance by residents and environmentalists on the southern Adriatic coast has grown within weeks into nationwide mass demonstrations against the right-wing government of Prime Minister Edi Rama, rampant corruption and the sell-off of the country to wealthy domestic and foreign investors. On June 20, according to Albanian media estimates, more than 250,000 people took to the streets in the capital, Tirana. Mass protests followed again on June 27.

The immediate trigger for the protests is a tourism project worth around €1.4 billion on the uninhabited island of Sazan and along the coast near Zvërnec, adjacent to the Narta Lagoon. The plans call for hotels, villas, apartments and a marina. The main investor is US businessman Jared Kushner, son-in-law of President Donald Trump. Kushner and Trump's daughter, Ivanka, reportedly discovered the island during a boat trip and decided to buy it.

The Narta Lagoon is one of the most biodiverse and among the last largely untouched coastal ecosystems in the Mediterranean. It is a resting place for some 200 bird species, including flamingos, which have become the symbol of the movement.

The government granted the project the status of a "strategic investment," thereby approving development in a protected natural area. The first protests began in the village of Zvërnec on May 23, after the coast had been cordoned off. When private security personnel attacked demonstrators on May 30 and police at the scene failed to intervene, the local dispute developed into a nationwide movement. The next day, the protests reached Tirana, where demonstrations have since centered on Skanderbeg Square and the prime

minister's office. Further rallies have taken place in Kosovo and in other European cities.

The protests are directed both against the ruthless US investors and Albania's political class, which is deeply corrupt and frequently operates openly outside the law. Officially, the protests are not backed by any party. Smaller parties such as Movement Together (Lëvizja Bashkë), a melting pot of pseudo-left and pro-EU forces, are seeking to capitalize on the widespread hostility to the establishment parties.

Parties of every stripe have, over decades, continuously worsened the social situation, producing deep distrust toward the official political establishment. The opposition parties have been unable to capitalize on the protests against Rama. Former Prime Minister Sali Berisha initially supported the resort project and only spoke out against it after the protests grew. As a result, he is widely and justifiably viewed as Rama's accomplice.

Young people in particular are playing a prominent role in the protests. As in the so-called Gen Z protests in numerous other countries, the younger generation is confronted above all with a social, political and economic catastrophe.

Anger over the planned luxury resort for the oligarch family of the gangster in the White House has become an expression of far deeper social contradictions. Albania remains one of the poorest countries in Europe. More than one-fifth of the population is officially considered poor. On January 1, the government raised the monthly minimum wage by 25 percent, to the equivalent of 520 euros, a figure that only underscores how low wages had previously been. The official unemployment rate stood at around 8 percent in the third quarter of 2025, but was nearly twice as high among young people. Even these figures, however,

hardly reflect social reality.

The result is long-standing mass emigration, above all of skilled and younger workers, which even the government and the European Commission now describe as a barrier to growth. As young people leave the country, the economy is increasingly oriented toward tourism, which already accounts for more than a quarter of economic output. In 2025, Albania received around 15 million foreign visitors and generated roughly 5 billion euros in tourism revenue. This model transforms the coast into a commodity. Beaches, bays and nature reserves are handed over to investors, while the population is excluded from the profits and—as in Zvërnec—literally excluded from their own beaches.

Rama's ruling Socialist Party, in power since 2013 and confirmed for a fourth consecutive term in 2025, advances this policy in the name of foreign direct investment and EU integration. Behind the charges of "corruption" and "lack of transparency" lies a system in which public assets are privatized and handed over to domestic oligarchs and international investors.

Rama defended the project as a vital foreign investment, minimized the scale of the protests and denounced sections of the movement as part of a "hybrid war" driven by disinformation and foreign interests. Criminal proceedings were initiated against 15 demonstrators, and three people were arrested.

On June 3, police blocked access roads to the capital to suppress further protests. Under the pretext of providing security for a football match, police used water cannons against peaceful demonstrators, including families with children. But the intimidation failed. The next day, even more people came out to protest.

Rama is under enormous pressure to push through market reforms and privatizations at record speed in order to meet Albania's target of EU accession by 2030. The prime minister recently described himself as an "EU fanatic." It is therefore hardly surprising that the European Commission backed the construction project, casually declaring that the Albanian government had carried out an environmental impact assessment.

The "Flamingo Revolution" is not an isolated event, but part of a broader wave of protests that has swept through the states of the former Yugoslavia and other parts of the Balkans.

In Serbia, the collapse of the newly renovated train station canopy in Novi Sad in November 2024, which killed 16 people, triggered the largest protest movement in decades. Student-led demonstrations swept through hundreds of cities. On March 15, 2025, more than 300,000 people gathered in Belgrade alone. The criticism centered on President Aleksandar Vučić's system of clientelism, opaque mega-projects such as the Belgrade Waterfront, and raw materials deals with corporations such as Rio Tinto. On June 27, Vučić announced his resignation and early elections in an effort to preempt his ouster.

In North Macedonia, 59 mostly young people were killed and nearly 200 injured in March last year when an illegally operated nightclub caught fire in Kočani. Its operating license had been obtained through bribery. Thousands demonstrated in Skopje and Kočani under the slogan "Who is next?" In Bosnia and Herzegovina, thousands protested for several days in Sarajevo after a tram accident killed one person. Anger subsequently boiled over at the dilapidated infrastructure, lack of safety precautions and indifference of the corrupt elites.

The Albanian protest movement expresses justified and deep-rooted social anger. But any improvement in the increasingly unbearable living conditions requires the political mobilization of broad layers of the population on the basis of an international socialist program. The defense of the natural environment, public assets and social rights requires the expropriation of the capitalist oligarchs, the overthrow of their political lackeys, and the unification of workers and youth in the Balkans, across Europe and internationally.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**