

US sanctions Albanian ex-PM Sali Berisha over corruption

Secretary of State Antony Blinken

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alusa - The US State Department on Wednesday sanctioned former Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha and his immediate family members, citing "involvement in significant corruption."

"In his official capacity as Prime Minister of Albania in particular, Berisha was involved in corrupt acts, such as misappropriation of public funds and interfering with public processes, including using his power for his own benefit and to enrich his political allies and his family members," said US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a statement. 76-year old Berisha, who is now a lawmaker in the opposition Democratic Party, will be barred from entering US territory along with his spouse and their two children.

The move will serve to "reaffirm the need for accountability and transparency in Albania's democratic institutions, government processes, and the actions of Albanian public officials," Blinken said.

The State Department furthermore reiterated "the US commitment to supporting political reforms key to Albania's democratic institutions."

Taulant Balla, general secretary of Albania's ruling Socialist party, hailed the US decision.

"I welcome the decision of the United States of America regarding Sali Berisha," Balla wrote. "It is a beautiful day for the Albanian Democracy." There was no immediate reaction from Berisha nor from his Democratic party.

Berisha became the country's first post-communist president from 1992 until 1997. He served as Prime Minister from 2005 to 2013.

Corruption has been an endemic problem in the Western Balkans nation since the fall of communism and a sticking point in the country's negotiations to join the European Union.

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