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NEWS 22 NOV 18

Albanian Police Clash With Protesters Over House Demolitions

Several police and protesters were injured in Tirana on Thursday after protesters seeking compensation for houses due for demolition to make way for a highway clashed with police near parliament.

Gjergji Erebara | BIRN | Tirana

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Protesters clash with police in Tirana on 22 November 2018. Photo: Malton Dibra/LSA

Albanian police said 12 police officers and three protesters were injured after protesters threw fireworks while protesting near parliament against the demolition without compensation of several dozen homes and businesses on the edge of Tirana.

The government plans to clear the area to enlarge a stretch of the Tirana ring road, and had offered below-market compensation for those with ownership deeds and two years' rent for the rest.

Members of about 300 families affected by the development have protested daily by blocking roads. The protest moved to parliament on Thursday, while Socialist Party MPs were summoned to a plenary session inside.

The protesters seek compensation for the loss of the houses, some of them built over two decades ago, along scores of other illegal developments across the country. They claim they will end up homeless if the plan is carried forward.

They were protesting especially against Tirana Mayor Erion Veliaj, who mocked the protesters as "cave dwellers" in a speech last week. Most inhabitants of the affected area had come here following the collapse of Communism in 1991 from remote mountainous areas.

Seeking to clarify his statement, Veliaj said later that he was referring to several opposition MPs seen among the protesters and not to local people in general.

However, hundreds of them hurled slogans like "We are not cave dwellers" while protesting at the parliament.

Police said about 11 of them were arrested following the violence.

Prime Minister Edi Rama later visited wounded police officers at Tirana Military Hospital and said violence would not be tolerated. Earlier, he attacked protesters as abusers, accusing some of owning several illegal buildings in several places.

Meanwhile, the opposition Democratic Party and Socialist Movement of Integration have accused the highway development of corruption, citing the unusually high costs of the works.

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Protesters clash with police in Tirana on 22 November 2018. Photo: Malton Dibra/LSA

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The 2.3 km-long highway is expected to cost about 40 million euros, which is about 17 million euros per kilometer.

The government claims the procurement was based on the law and says the cost is high because works include several underpasses and overpasses.

The government has previously destroyed scores of buildings legally or illegally built but the extent of the current demolitions seems higher than in previous cases.

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