Beat: News

24 Albanian Air Traffic Controllers Arrested Over Wage Decrease Row

Air traffic stopped 24 hours in Albania

TIRANA, 10.04.2021, 00:23 Time

exit.al - Albanian police arrested 24 air traffic controllers last night in Tirana.

They were escorted to the police station where four have now been released.

A lawyer for the workers, employees of AlbControl gave a statement to the media where he said they were arested at midnight last night. Some were arrested at the airport, others from a hotel near the AlbControl office, and others were called on the phone and then presented themselves voluntarily.

He said that those who were released were interrogated and no charges were filed against them.

Pirro Lako who was released told the media that the police seized his mobile during detention. He was asked why he undertook such action, and why he declared incapacity. He said his phone has not been returned and he thinks it will be sent to the prosecutor.

It´s reported that the investigation is for the criminal offense of “abuse of office“.

Last night, the Albanian army and police took control of the country´s only airport after Prime Minister Edi Rama accused President Ilir Meta of attempting to stage a coup d´etat.

Air traffic controllers had suspended their work for 24 hours due to a “temporary inability to work“ after their wages were slashed by almost half. They said that stress caused by the pandemic and their wage reduction made it impossible for them to carry out their duties. They were adamant they had not abandoned their work and were not on strike, but were following the guidelines of their work.

As a result, all flights to and from the airport were canceled between 10 am yesterday and 10 am this morning.

One week ago, their union met with the President, and presented him with concerns over some decisions of the board during the last year. They claim that the board has changed regulations and manuals related to the safety of air control, thus putting at risk their safety and that of the country´s air space.

They claimed that the government has dismissed their pleas for the last 10 months, despite support by the Air Traffic Controllers European Union Coordination (ATCEUC).

They demanded the return to work of some of their colleagues allegedly fired or suspended today, repeal of some board decisions, payment of full salary according to a collective contract, full transparency for Albcontrol operations in 2020, and for one union member to be part of the board.

The suspension of air traffic prompted Minister of Infrastructure Belinda Balluku to meet them at the airport. She then told journalists that theirs was a strike, it was against the law, and that it´s not the government´s responsibility to increase their salary but Albcontrol´s.

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-18502/24-albanian-air-traffic-controllers-arrested-over-wage-decrease-row.html

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UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes
UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com
Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619