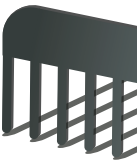


Preportr

Lekaj's game with subsidies



Pal Lekaj is accused of abuse of office while he was mayor of Gjakova. The indictment filed by the Special Prosecution of Kosovo stated that with the actions of Lekaj and other officials involved in this indictment, the Municipality of Gjakova was damaged by approximately 70 thousand euros. The trial, in which Lekaj has pleaded not guilty, will continue after a new financial expertise requested by the defense is conducted regarding the case.

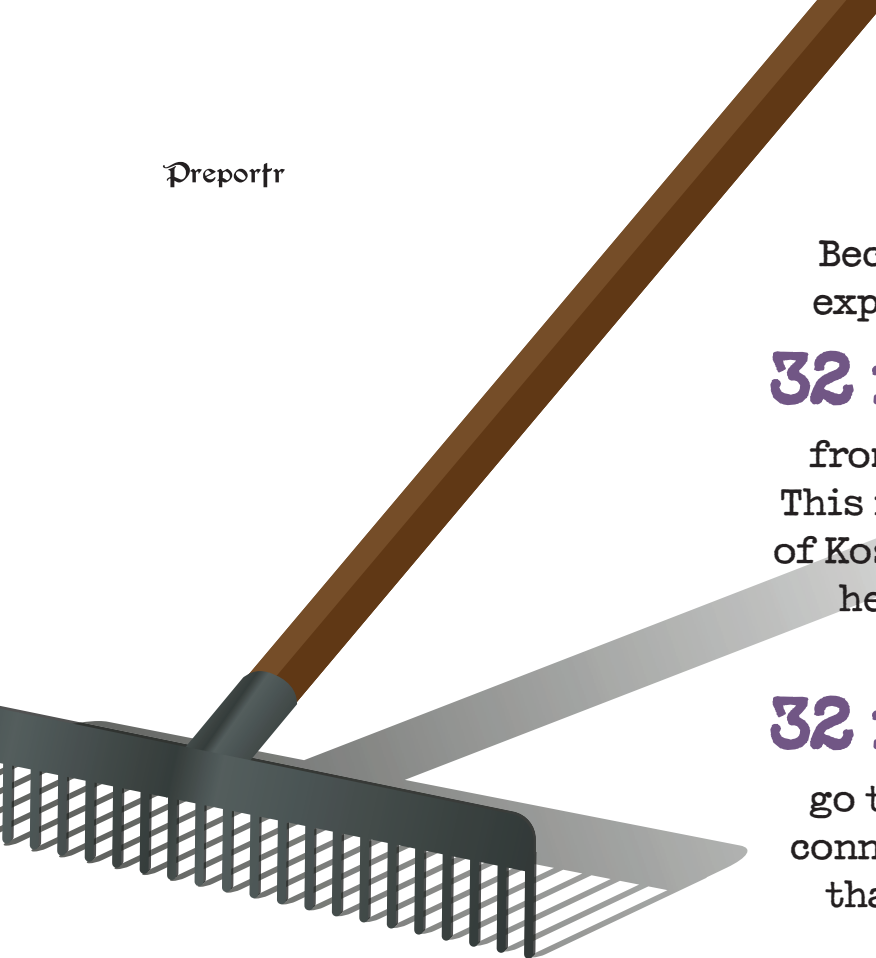


Besa Kalaja

Pal Lekaj became known to the public in 2007 when he won the mandate for the mayor of Gjakova, although before this he was engaged in the Municipality of Gjakova as director, assembly member and chief executive officer. He won the mandate of mayor for this municipality two years later as well, in 2009, but he did not make it the third time since the citizens of Gjakova did not give him their confidence. He was defeated by Mimoza Kusari-Lila.

His political career does not end here. Pal Lekaj became a member of Kosovo Assembly from among AAK in 2014. The doctor from Gjakova was vocal in his mandate as an MP, and as part of the opposition MPs in the last term he threw tear gas in the Assembly opposing the demarcation with Montenegro and the creation of the Association of Serb-majority municipalities. Lekaj was arrested by the police for this action, and he is also part of a case that was sent to court against the deputies who threw tear gas. The case of Lekaj and other deputies has not yet come to an end.

Pal Lekaj is one of the central figures of the Alliance for the Future of Kosova (AAK), holding the position of its vice president. In the last term, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj granted Lekaj the management of the government department that manages the most funds from the state budget, and that is the Ministry of Infrastructure. In this ministry, Lekaj did not bring anything new. He continued as his predecessors who orient almost all the funds in the construction of roads and highways. During his tenure Pal Lekaj was accused of gifting Bechtel Enka 53 million euros for the Pristina-Hani i Elezit highway. For an annex to the contract which was signed with the company carrying out the works on this highway, Lekaj accused his predecessor, minister Lutfi Zharku. Neither Lekaj nor Zharku have indicated what it actually took for Bechtel Enka to receive additional funds for the highway, except the fact that they were late in payment. According to daily Koha Ditore, investigations against the Ministry of Infrastructure are being conducted in two cases – for Arbën Xhaferi highway and for the homologation of cars.



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Lekaj generous with the funds of the ministry

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According to the decision obtained by Kallxo.com, the connections are planned to be built in the village of Gërlicë of Viti and one in Ferizaj, and the overpass in the village of Paldenicë of Hani i Elezit.

The decision to give the right to build these two connections only to "Bechtel Enka", according to kallxo.com excludes the possibility of a tendering competition.

The only problem during Lekaj's tenure as minister was not only the Arbën Xhaferi highway. Another problem arose when the media reported that senior officials of this ministry were also involved in the Pristina-Gjilan highway.

A "Justice in Kosovo" report found that the family of the deputy minister of infrastructure, Rexhep Kadriu, was involved in the construction of the Pristina-Gjilan

highway. According to the report, this company has supplied concrete for the construction of this highway.

Despite the problems and doubts raised by the civil society and the media about the Arbën Xhaferi highway, the Haradinaj government planned to build yet another highway, the Dukagjini highway.

Pal Lekaj already has an indictment for corruption and the trial against him is taking place concerning a case of abuse of official position while he was mayor of Gjakova for subsidies allocated to farmers in this municipality and damage to the municipality according to this indictment. reaches up to 70 thousand euros. This has not prevented him from completing his term as minister, although it has been continuously said and asked by the international and local factors that there should be no persons accused of corruption in the Government of Kosovo. Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj did not dismiss Lekaj from the Government even when his PDK partner in the government did so with Minister Besim Beqaj, and Deputy Minister Agim Çeku. When asked about this, Haradinaj said that all parties have their own specifics and that he will dismiss his ministers only if they are accused while exercising the minister's mandate.

Haradinaj did not dismiss his ministers with indictments but did so with two deputy ministers, one of whom

had no indictment - Musa Cena, who was deputy minister for regional development, who was suspected of bribery, and dismissed his deputy minister of public administration, Bujar Nerjovaj in order for him to continue the trial, according to Haradinaj. Nerjovaj was convicted by the Basic Court of Prizren for the criminal offense of abuse of office. He was accused while being the director of the inspection in the Municipality of Prizren.

The same thing has been demanded from civil society organizations and foreign embassies for the people who would be part of the lists to run for the mandate of MP. The Alliance for the Future of Kosova (AAK) has included Lekaj on the list for MP despite the indictment for corruption. Lekaj also won the third term for MP.

Preportr has analyzed the assets of Pal Lekaj declared over the years in the Anti-Corruption Agency.

Pal Lekaj does not manage only this ministry with millions of euros. His assets declared to the Anti-Corruption Agency (AKK) amount to millions of euros as well. Until 2017 his assets amounted to 6.5 million euros. In the same year his assets dropped to 1.8 million euros, as he had declared that he had shared with his brothers.

Indictment for subsidies

Pal Lekaj and Ismet Isufi are accused to have distributed subsidies, through “UNION-VL” company, contrary to the Law on Management of Public Finance while acting as officials – the former as the mayor of Gjakova and the latter as director of the Directorate of Agriculture.

The indictment states: “The decisions issued by the defendant Pal Lekaj cover only the amount of 235.400 euros, while other decisions have no legal basis and go up to the amount of 631.671.82 euros”.

According to the indictment, the subsidies were authorized by the defendants without supervision as to whether the payments were made to the farmers and having no contract with “UNION-VL” in which case about 40% of over three thousand farmers did not get the payments at all.

The defendants have exceeded their legal competencies, says the indictment, because in addition to the fund for subsidies, they have used other budget lines of the Municipality of Gjakova for subsidies, causing a possible damage of up to 250 thousand euros.

Veli Hajdaraga, according to the indictment, during 2008-2015 gave inaccurate information that allegedly all applicants for subsidies have received subsidies and he allowed for other persons to wrongfully receive funds

instead of farmers who have been on the list to receive those subsidies.

The accused VH, in addition to the criminal offense of fraud with subsidies, is also accused of tax evasion in the amount of about 35 thousand euros, because according to the prosecution, in order to avoid tax payments, he declared lower income of his company, UNION-VL.

The Special Prosecution in the indictment has shown that the number of farmers who had to be interviewed is over three thousand. Thus, a number of respondents showed the trend of 40% of beneficiaries of subsidies not to receive the funds at all.

Therefore, the exact amount of damage that could be verified by the interviewed farmers, according to the indictment, is about 69 thousand euros.

Pal Lekaj and Ismet Isufi are accused to have continuously committed the criminal offenses of embezzlement



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during the exercise of duty and abuse of official position or authority.

The Prosecution took the decision to start the investigation on April 12, 2016 but the case of Lekaj and others has lasted longer than expected, as it has been partially rejected at times, and then returned by the Court of Appeals for reinstatement.

Public pressure, reason for filing an indictment

In the hearings held in the case where Pal Lekaj is accused of abuse of office, the defense said that the prosecution in this case did not have any evidence to raise the indictment except for the fact that the public opinion is demanding the fight against corruption. In one of the hearings, after hearing the prosecutor and the TAK representative, Lekaj's lawyer, Arianit Koci, said that the uninterrupted public campaign to fight corruption has made the prosecutor make terrible mistakes by filing an indictment without any founded evidence.

"The axis of this indictment has been filed upon baseless evidence. The prosecution has misinterpreted the evidence during the investigation period. Regarding the decisions for allocation of subsidies, the experts said that they were signed by Mr. Lekaj, as they were first signed by the municipal board and after the decisions were drafted by the legal office of the municipality, which was legally competent that no decision is to be drafted or signed against the law", said Koci.

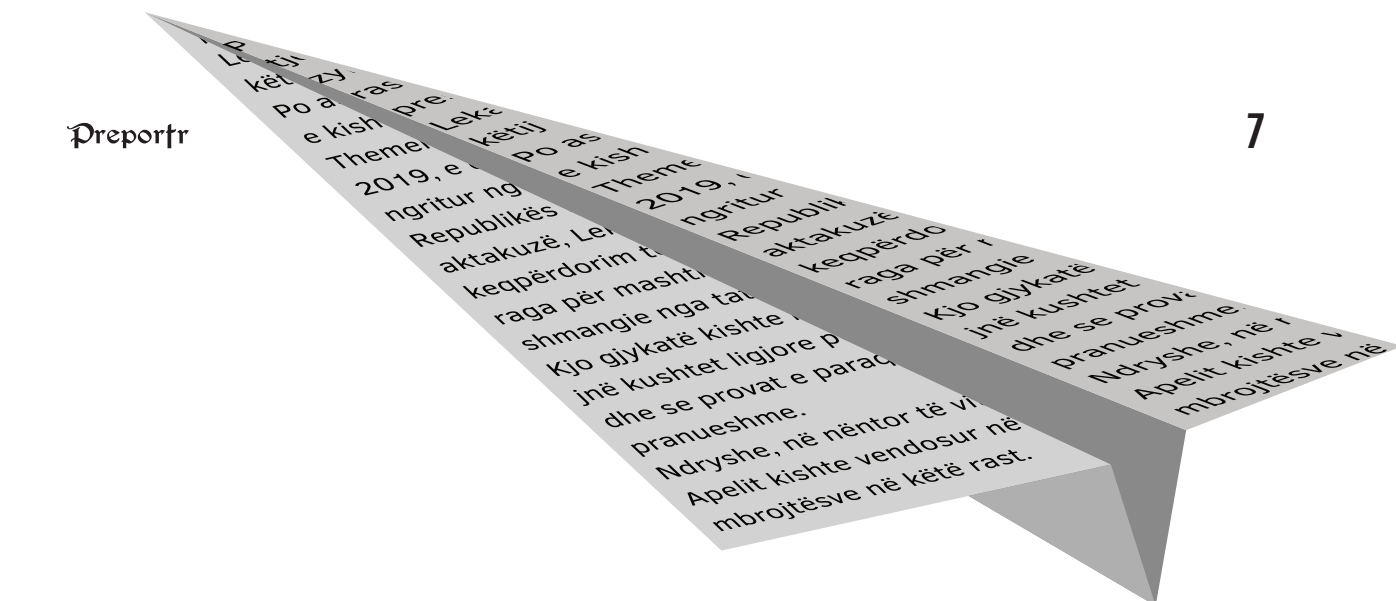
In his introductory remarks, Special Prosecutor Atdhe Demaj said that the indictment was based on evidence according to which it will be established that the accused had committed the said criminal offense.

The representative of the Tax Administration of Kosovo, Shpend Pllana, also agreed to the remarks of the prosecutor and the indictment in this session.

But the defense did not agree with the financial expertise that had been carried out in this case also due to the fact that the person who had done it had passed away. Thus, they asked the court to make a new financial expertise. This request for defense was accepted by the



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The former mayor of Gjakova and currently the minister of Infrastructure, Pal Lekaj and others had pleaded not guilty to all charges at the initial hearing held on May 31, 2018.

has passed away, this trial panel has decided to engage another expert, and the trial panel have notified me that these expertise have been provided. Therefore I propose to the Court to merge the case PKR.nr.64/18 / 16/18 with that PKR.nr.16 / 18 ”, declared prosecutor Dema.

The trial panel in this case has approved the proposal of the special prosecutor, on the grounds that the evidence is interrelated and that in this case we are dealing with the same provision of the indictment, and in order to economize the criminal proceedings.

G.R. was acquitted in 2017 on the grounds that it had not been established that he had committed the criminal offense for which he was charged. Following the prosecution’s appeal, his case was remanded for retrial in 2018. The case returned for a second time to retrial by the

Court of Appeals and now the Basic Court of Gjakova has decided to merge the case.

In the case of Lekaj and others, several other officials of the Municipality of Gjakova were initially charged, but the court rejected the charges against them.

It is unknown when the next hearing will be held.

Lekaj's wealth

Pal Lekaj's assets until 2017 amounted several millions of euros. He declared movable and immovable property in the amount of more than

6 million euros

until 2017 where he clarified that his wealth has dropped to

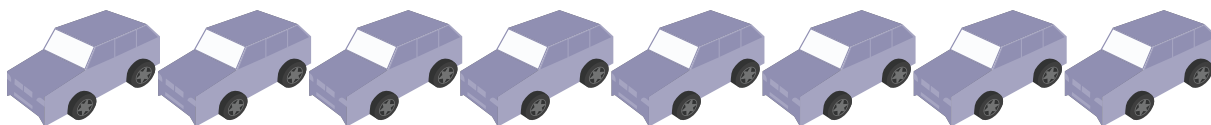
1.8 million euros

after he had split from his brothers with whom, until that year, he stated to have had assets abroad.

An analysis of his assets carried out by Organization Çohu! shows a discrepancy between the assets and the declared income.

“During 2013–2016, he stated that he bought eight cars worth

158,000 euros,



while for this period of time
the declared income was

18,900 euros.

The value of the acquired assets is

139,100 euros

higher than the declared income”, is
stated further in this analysis.

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