

Kosovo Quietly Signs Up Top US Lobbyists

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Kosovo's government has discretely engaged the lobbying services of one of Washington's top firms for \$50,000 a month, after having been forced to cancel an identical agreement with the firm last year for breaking public procurement laws.

✖ Balkan Insight has obtained a copy of an official US document, which shows that Kosovo signed up the services of the lobbying firm Patton Boggs on August 31.

The document, logged at the Department of Justice, says Patton Boggs will offer Kosovo "advisory services on legal and advocacy issues to be used for expansion of bilateral and multilateral relations".

The company will also be "fostering investments and trade opportunities for Kosovo, as well as gathering funds from foreign aid programs".

Although the deal with the company was apparently signed on August 31, it has not been announced by the government, which last year was forced to cancel a similar contract.

Frank Wisner, Patton Bogg's foreign affairs advisor, met Thaci in the United States last July. According to a press release issued by the PM's office they discussed "current political developments in Kosovo and the achievements up to now of Kosovo's institutions".

Wisner is an old Kosovo hand. The former US Secretary of State under George Bush, Condoleezza Rice, appointed him the US's special representative to the Kosovo Status Talks in 2005. Wisner played a crucial role in negotiating Kosovo's independence.

In September 2010 the government then voted to employ Patton Boggs at a rate of 50,000 dollars a month [38,000 euro].

The cabinet was forced to cancel the decision in November after Balkan Insight revealed that the move appeared to break Kosovo's own law on public procurement.

This was because the cabinet had simply selected Patton Boggs instead of allowing a competitive bidding process to take place. The cabinet had also not justified to the Public Procurement Agency why it went ahead with a single-source tender.

Government officials said they annulled the deal on legal advice but denied having broken procurement rules.

The document recently seen by Balkan Insight showed that the annulled deal has since been quietly revived.

The Foreign Ministry said it had awarded the contract in coordination with the Procurement Agency.

Confusingly, the Agency first stated that it had no record of such a request from the ministry, but then later said it did.

Balkan Insight has now seen a copy of the request by the Foreign Ministry to the Procurement Agency to secretly award the contract to Patton Boggs with a single-source tender.

Seemingly unaware that all such contracts are required, by law, to be published online by the US Justice Department, Kosovo's Foreign Ministry argued that if the contract became public it could hinder Patton Boggs' lobbying work.

The Foreign Ministry's request was approved by the Procurement Agency.

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