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### Leyton Orient club president Francesco Becchetti avoids extradition to Albania

- Francesco Becchetti will not be extradited to Albania on multiple charges
- Albanian government seized Mr Becchetti's assets after 2015 arrest
- Lawyers for the Albanian government have responded with intent to appeal

By PRESS ASSOCIATION

PUBLISHED: 18:03, 8 July 2016 | UPDATED: 18:03, 8 July 2016

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Leyton Orient president Francesco Becchetti will not be extradited to Albania on fraud, forgery and money laundering charges, a court has ruled.

District judge Nina Tempia, sitting at London's Westminster Magistrates' Court, said she was staying the case against Mr Becchetti, 48, and his business associate Mauro De Renzis, 61, who was charged with the same offences.

Lawyers for the Albanian government immediately responded by saying they intend to appeal. They now have 14 days to do this.



Leyton Orient owner Francesco Becchetti (left) will not be extradited to Albania on multiple charges

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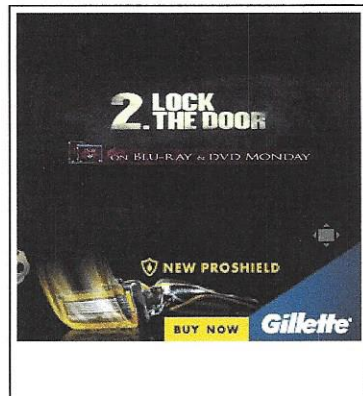


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During an earlier two-day abuse of process hearing, lawyers for the Italian businessmen said the case was 'politically motivated'.

They argued there had been an attempted manipulation of the extradition process by the Albanian government.

The judge told the businessmen: 'The abuse of process has succeeded. These proceedings are stayed.'

Mr Becchetti has had significant business interests in Albania in sectors ranging from the media and construction to hydroelectric power since the 1990s.

Julian Knowles QC, representing both businessmen, said the government had launched a 'baseless' tax investigation against Mr Becchetti as part of an attack on him and his business interests.



Lawyers for the Albanian government have responded with the intent to appeal the court's decision

After his June 2015 arrest, Mr Becchetti's assets were seized by the Albanian government and his bank accounts were frozen. His TV station, called Agon, was shut down and journalists were harassed.

Mr De Renzis held a senior position at the TV station and was also a shareholder.

Mr Knowles told the court that Mr Becchetti had made an enemy of many Albanian leaders, especially socialist Prime Minister Edi Rama.

He stated that Mr Rama had 'taken a dislike' to Mr Becchetti because Agon, unlike other media organisations in Albania, was critical of the government.

In making the abuse of process application, Mr Knowles said the Albanian Ministry of Justice had presented a document to the court which contained a 'lie' stating that the extradition request could not be withdrawn.

In response, the Albanian government said there had been no 'undisclosed and sinister motive at play', stressing its wish for the extradition to take place so there could be a prosecution.

If the extradition had not been thrown out by the magistrates' court in London, the Albanian government had wanted it to be stayed until other linked legal cases end, which could have taken until the middle of 2018.

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