

Albanian Elections Observatory Brief

Issue No 1_April 19, 2013

Introduction: Albanian Politics Today

Albania is a parliamentary democracy with the executive power controlled by the Prime Minister, who is the Chairman of the Council of Ministers. Ministers are nominated by the President on the basis of the Prime Minister's recommendation. The president of the republic is elected every five years by the People's Assembly and can serve a maximum of two terms. The current president is Bujar Nishani (PDSH), elected on July 24th 2012 for a five-year term, replacing Bamir Topi as his term came to an end.

Nishani was elected by a simple majority, receiving 73 votes of the 140-seat parliament. His election was marred with three failed previous attempts because of the failure of the political parties to agree on a candidate. It was only in 2002 that Albanian political parties managed to agree to elect a joint president.

Table 1. Presidents of Albania

Name	Term	Political Party
Ramiz Alia	1991 - 1992	Socialist Party of Albania
Sali Berisha	1992 - 1997	Democratic Party of Albania
Rexhep Mejdani	1997 - 2002	Socialist Party of Albania
Alfred Moisiu	2002 - 2007	Joint President (Consensus)
Bamir Topi	2007 - 2012	Democratic Party of Albania
Bujar Nishani	2012 -	Democratic Party of Albania

Albania has been plagued with disputed elections for the past two decades. From 1990 to 2011, Albania has organized seven elections for the National Assembly, six elections for its municipal assemblies, and three referendums; it will hold its eighth parliamentary election on 23 June 2013. These elections are of great importance because they are seen as an important test for Albania's democracy by the West. The first multiparty election, held in 1991, was won decisively by the

communist Albanian Party of Labor, which had previously ruled the country for almost 50 years. In 1992, the second election was won by the Democratic Party (PDSH) led by Sali Berisha. In the third election in 1996, the PDSH won an overwhelming parliamentary majority again, however the elections were marked by blatant ballot-rigging and police supervision of the opposition. A snap election was called in 1997, following several months of near-anarchy, which was sparked by the collapse of the "pyramid" investment schemes, and was won by the Socialist Party (PSSH).

The 2001 parliamentary election was the most drawn-out in Albania's history. Due to numerous irregularities and accusations of electoral fraud, the voting process took five rounds to elect a clear winner. Finally, the Socialist Party secured 73 seats. In the 2005 parliamentary elections, PDSH returned to power.

Table 2. Chronology of Albanian Elections

Elections 1991 - 2011			
Year	Parliamentary Elections	Municipal Elections	Referendums
1991	X [Disputed]		
1992	X [Accepted]	X [Accepted]	
1994			X [Disputed]
1996	X [Disputed]	X [Disputed]	
1997	X [Disputed]		X [Disputed]
1998			X [Boycotted]
2000		X [Disputed]	
2001	X [Disputed]		
2003		X [Disputed]	
2005	X [Disputed]		
2007		X [Disputed]	
2009	X [Disputed]		
2011		X [Disputed]	

Together with other small right-wing parties, it formed a coalition government and has enjoyed a comfortable majority. During their rule, Albania experienced a tumultuous period and numerous changes took place.

The Albanian Electoral Systems since 1990

No other European country has experienced the kinds of extreme electoral patterns seen in Albania in the past 23 years; the country has gone from a pure majority system in 1990, to a mixed system with majority tendencies from 1992 to 2005, to a proportional representation system in 2009 (Table 3). The wave of change can also be observed in the size of the Albanian legislative body. The 1998 constitution changed the size of the Parliament to 140 MPs and has not grown since then. Albania's experimentation with the electoral system has not allowed for the creation of a stable electoral tradition. Thus, no electoral result has been unanimously accepted, with the exception of the 1992 election (Table 2). All other elections were disputed and boycotted by one competitive party or another.

Table 3. Electoral Systems in Albania 1991 – 2009

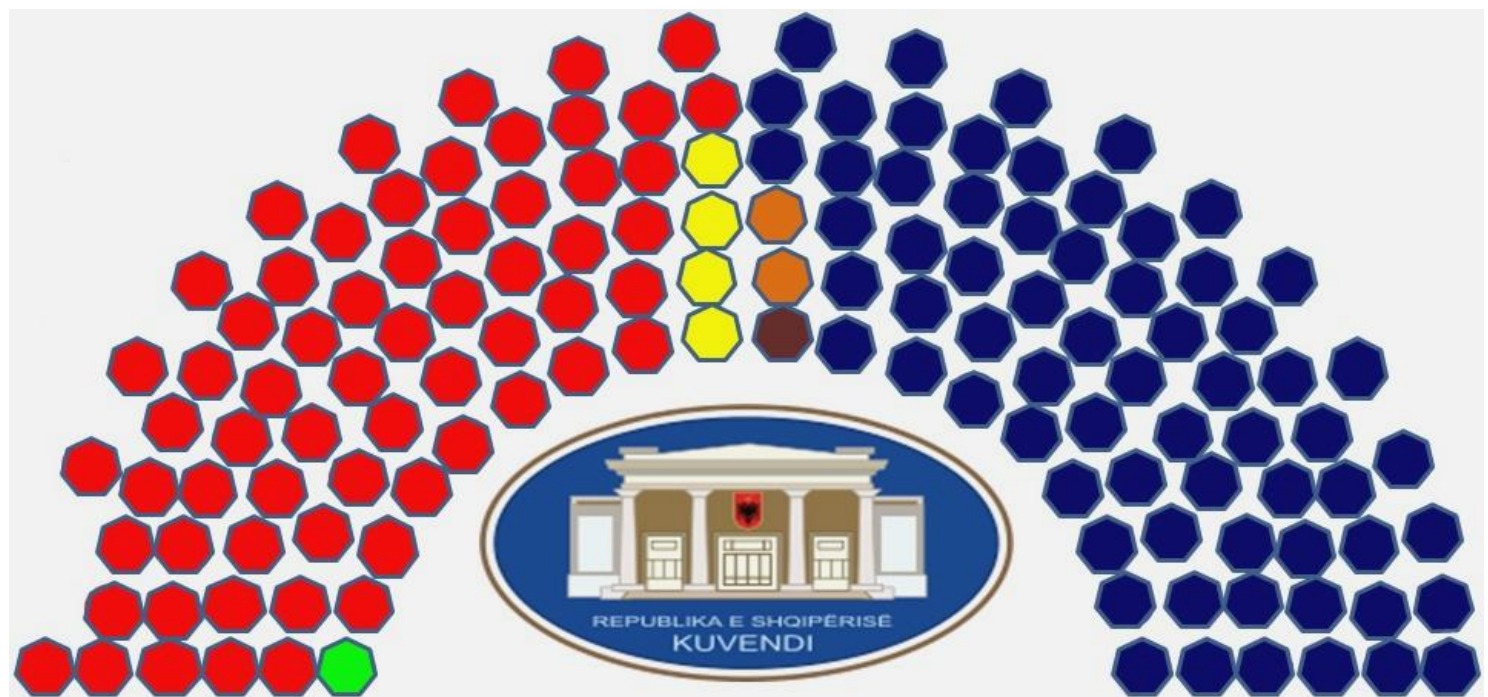
Year	Number of Seats	System	Allocation of Seats	Threshold
1991	250	Majoritarian	250 M	0
1992	140	Mixed (Proportional-Majoritarian)	100M +40P	4
1996	140	Mixed (Proportional-Majoritarian)	115M +25P	4
1997	155	Mixed (Proportional-Majoritarian)	115M +40P	2
2001	140	Mixed (Proportional-Majoritarian)	100M +40P	2.5
2005	140	Mixed (Proportional-Majoritarian)	100M +40P	2.5
2009	140	Proportional Regional	140 P	3

Note: M=Majoritarian, P=Proportional

Source: Albanian Council on Foreign Relations

In the Albanian parliament, the 140 MPs are elected through a party-list proportional representation system every four years. A government can be formed if a party or a coalition of parties secures at least 71 seats in the parliament. In 2009, a new electoral law introduced a regional proportional electoral system, with closed candidate lists. According to the new system, electoral regions correspond to the administration territorial regions of the country. As a result, the country was divided into 12 constituencies. The constituencies are of various sizes, with the number of mandates ranging from four in Kukës to 32 in Tirana, based on the total number of citizens registered within each constituency. This system allows for a variation of the party threshold in each region and limits the number of parties entering parliament. This electoral law introduced a threshold of three per cent for single parties and five per cent for coalitions at the constituency level. In the 2009 parliamentary elections, six political parties entered the parliament. There were 34 parties running, and all but one (who ran independently) were grouped into electoral alliances.

Figure 1. Seats of the political parties in the parliament



Political Party	Total Number of Mandates	Leader	Founded	Ideology	Political Position
Democratic Party of Albania (PDSH)	68	Sali Berisha	1990	Liberal Conservatism Pro-European	Center-Right
Socialist Party of Albania (PSSH)	64	Edi Rama	1991	Social Democracy Pro-European	Center-Left
Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI)	4	Ilir Meta	2004	Social Democracy Pro-European	Center-Left
Party for Justice, Integration and Unity (PDIU)	2	Shpëtim Idrizi	2011	Nationalism Patriotism	Center-Right
Republican Party of Albania (PR)	1	Fatmir Mediu	1991	National Conservatism Pro-European	Right-Wing
Human Right Union Party (PBDNJ)	1	Vangjel Dule	1992	Minority Politics Social Liberalism Civic Nationalism	Center

Source: Albanian Parliament – the official website

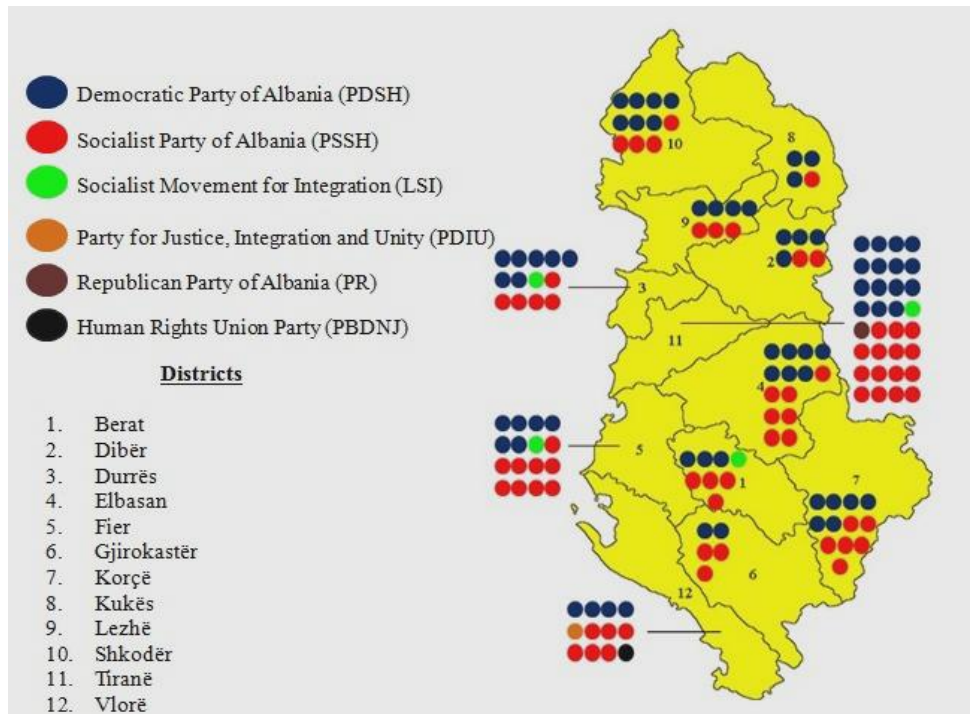
In the 2009 elections, the PDSH and the PSSH won an almost equal share of the total vote (the difference was around 10,000 votes), but the PDSH got three parliamentary seats more than PSSH. The LSI came in third with four seats and was followed by three other political parties (PR, PBDNJ and PDIU) (Figure 1).

Albania continues to be governed by a coalition known as the “Alliance for Change” led by the center-right Democratic Party (PDSH) of Prime Minister Sali Berisha and two minor parties: the Republican Party (PR) and the Party for Justice, Integration and Unity (PDIU). In the

2009 election, the coalition gained 70 seats in the 140-member parliament. Among the coalition’s 70 seats, 68 were occupied by the Democratic Party. The rival center-left alliance, “Union for Change”, led by Tirana’s former mayor and socialist party leader, Edi Rama, won 66 mandates. Among the coalition’s 66 seats, one was occupied by the Human Rights Union Party, which represents Albania’s Greek minority. The center-left Socialist Movement for Integration, the party of former PSSH Prime Minister Ilir Meta, gathered a number of minor parties into its own electoral grouping, winning the

remaining four seats. According to the results, none of the pre-electoral coalitions were able to form a government independently. Surprisingly, in September 2009, a PDSH-LSI coalition government was officially formed despite the LSI’s long history of opposition to Berisha’s PDSH.

Figure 2. Distribution of Mandates – 2009 Parliamentary Elections



Source: Central Election Commission (KQZ)

In 2009, the PDSH won far more seats than it had in the 2005 election, however, the PSSH also gained seats (Table 4 and 5). Most of the small parties that had been represented in parliament in 2005-2009 did not win any seats in the 2009 Assembly, while the Socialist Movement for Integration and the Republican Party lost many seats. Fears of disproportionate representation became a reality, as the two main political parties together won 85 per cent of the votes, but received 95 per cent of the seats in the parliament. Thus, the results led to an increased concentration of power in the hands of the PDSH and the PSSH.

Table 4. Albania: 2009 parliamentary elections

Coalition/party	Votes	%	Seats	Seats change since 2005
Alliance for Change	712.745	46,92	70	
Democratic Party of Albania	610.463	40,18	68	(+12)
Republican Party of Albania	31.990	2,11	1	(-10)
Party for Justice and Integration*	14.477	0,95	1	
Union for Change	688.748	45,34	66	
Socialist Party of Albania	620.586	40,85	65	(+32)
Human Right Union Party	18.078	1,19	1	(-2)
Socialist Alliance for Integration	84.407	5,56	4	
Socialist Movement for Integration	73.678	4,85	4	(-1)

* In 2011 it joined the Party for Integration and Unity and together they formed the Party for Justice, Integration and Unity (PDIU). Source: Central Election Commission (KQZ)

Table 5. Albania: 2005 parliamentary elections

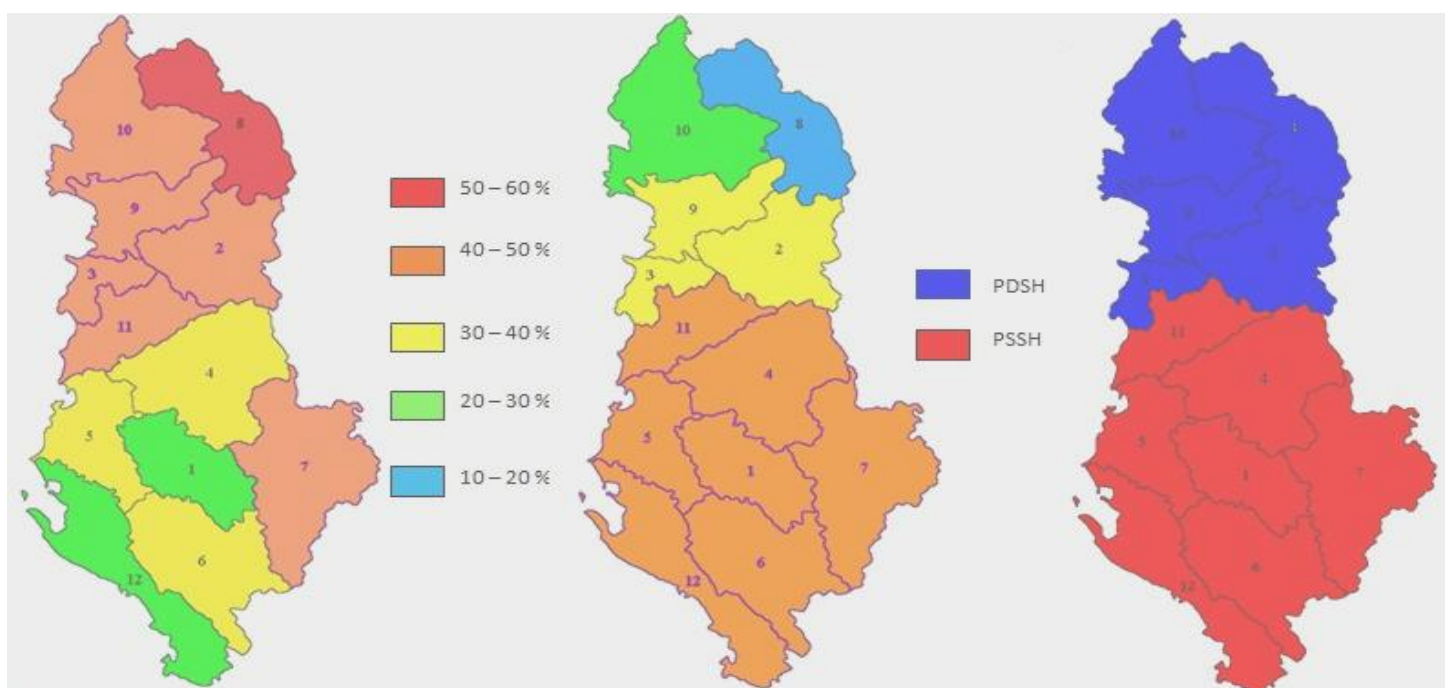
Party/coalition	Votes	%	Single seats won	Allocated Proportional seats	Total number of seats
Democratic Party of Albania	104.798	7.7	52	-	56
Socialist Party of Albania	121.412	8.9	42	-	42
Alliance for Freedom, Justice and Welfare	457.143	33.5	-	18	18
Social Democratic Party	174.103	12.7	-	7	7
Socialist Movement for Integration	114.798	8.4	1	4	5
Environmentalist Agrarian Party	896.35	6.6	-	4	4
Democratic Alliance	650.93	4.8	-	3	3
Social Democracy Party	579.98	4.2	-	2	2
Human Rights Union Party	564.03	4.1	-	2	2

Source: Central Election Commission (KQZ)

The Electorate

Albanian electoral politics have traditionally shown a north-south divide, reflected in the 2005 and 2009 results. Voters in both halves of the country cast their ballots for the established leadership networks of the two main political parties. The PDSH scored a landslide victory of the northern constituencies while the PSSH did well in southern districts (Figure 3).

Figure 3. 2009 Parliamentary Elections



Democratic Party of Albania (PDSH)

Socialist Party of Albania (PSSH)

Source: Central Election Commission (KQZ)

The size of Albanian electorate has been increasing over the years. In 2009, the number of registered voters (people of 18 years of age and above) increased to 3,085,946. This was a far larger number than the first multi-party elections in 1991 where a total of 1,984,933 Albanians were registered to vote. The most worrisome trend for Albania's elections, though, is the decreasing turnout. The

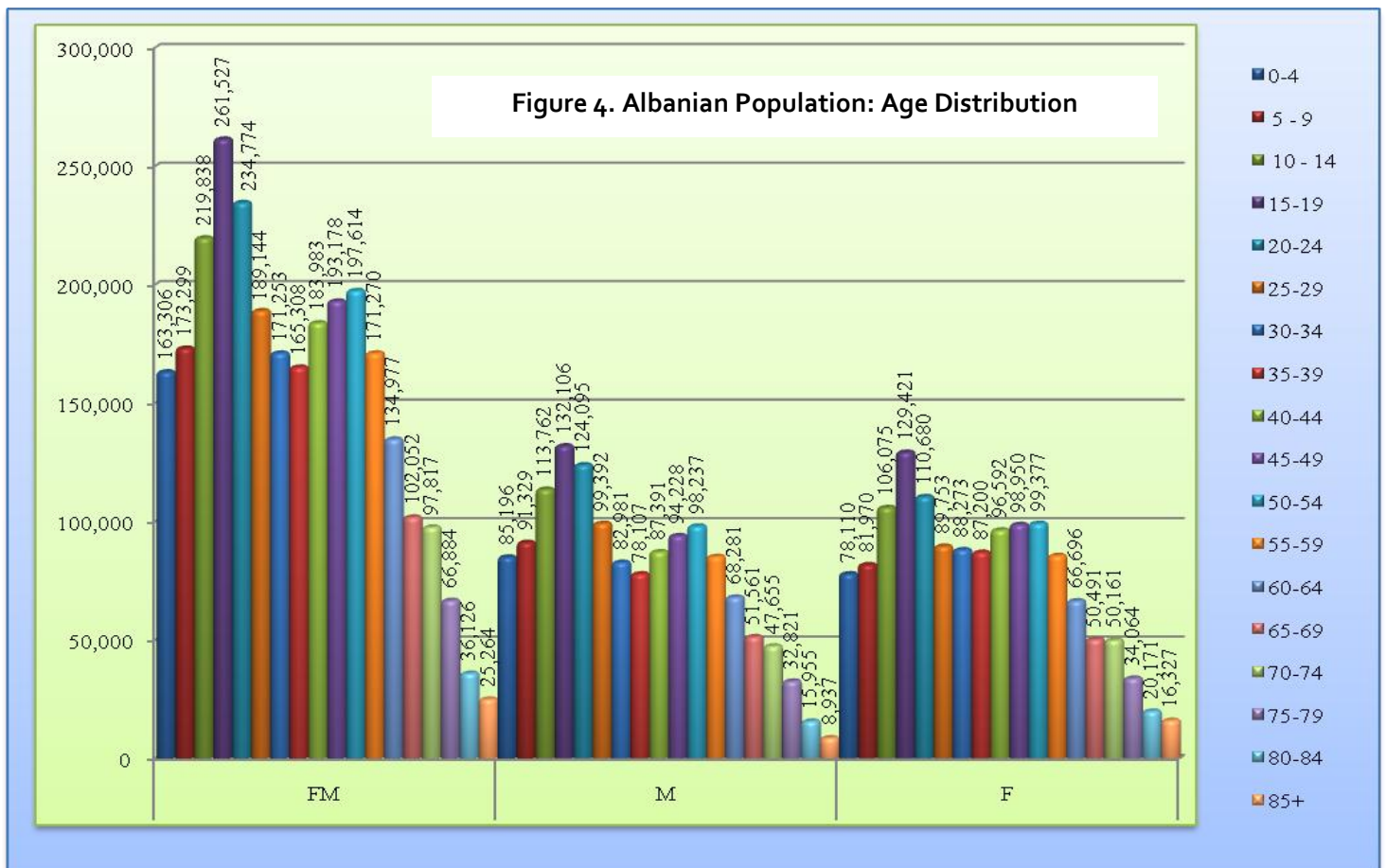
earlier elections had higher voter turnout than did the last decade's elections; the first election, organized in 1991, saw a 98.92 per cent turnout. This turnout however significant fell by 2005, where official data documented participation at under 50 per cent (Table 6). This was

considered worrisome for a young democracy such as Albania's; the low turnout reflected a growing fatigue among Albania's electorate, and increasing disillusionment with politicians and the political process. Voter turnout did increase in 2009 which many viewed as a reaction against Sali Berisha and his unpopular policies.

Table 6. Voter turnout data for Albania

Year	Voter Turnout	Total Vote	Size of Electorate	Population*
2009	50.77 %	1,566,079	3,084,946	3,194,417
2005	48.73 %	1,389,320	2,850,821	3,563,112
2001	54.95 %	1,373,210	2,499,238	3,490,435
1997	72.56 %	1,412,929	1,947,235	3,510,500
1996	89.08 %	1,963,344	2,204,002	3,481,000
1992	91.50 %	1,830,000	2,000,000	3,363,000
1991	98.92 %	1,963,568	1,984,933	3,255,000

2011 Census: 2. 821.977. Source: Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance



Note: F=Female, M=Male

Source: Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT)

Conclusion

To sum up, the elections of June 2013 will be a test for the new electoral system, as well as an indicator for the extent of polarization between the parties of Berisha and Rama, the voter turn-out, and above all, the quality of Albanian democracy more than two decades after the regime transition shifts in 1990-1991.

Our Team: Dr. Dimitris Sotiropoulos, Dr. Ioannis Armakolas, Eda Gemi, Anastasis Valvis, Bledar Feta, Skerlida Agolli, Errmela Gianna and Milva Lambro.

Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP)- SOUTH EAST EUROPEAN PROGRAMME

Vas. Sofias, 10676 Athens, Greece | Tel. +30 210 7257 110 | Fax +30 210 7257 114 | E-mail see_programme@eliamep.gr

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