

Albanian Elections Observatory Brief

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Electoral Procedures, Electoral Campaign, Party Coalitions

Introduction

ELIAMEP's South-East Europe Programme has recently established the Albanian Elections Observatory with the intention to closely monitor the political developments in Albania in the lead up to the country's national elections, which will take place on June, 23 2013. This briefing note analyzes Albania's electoral administration process and the power struggle between the major political parties grappling to take control of the Central Elections Commission (CEC), which manages all elections. This partisan power grab has generated a high level of concern within the international community. In addition, this briefing dissects the new party coalitions slated to participate in the parliamentary elections, while describing each coalition's makeup and their political dynamics. Finally, given that the forthcoming elections are expected to be a closely fought battle between the two major coalitions, this briefing will offer a few words about potential changes in the political landscape in four electoral districts.

Table 1: Political Parties in Albania

Political Party	Acronym	Leader	Number of Seats (2009)
Democratic Party of Albania	PDSH	Sali Berisha	68
Socialist Party of Albania	PSSH	Edi Rama	64
Socialist Movement for Integration	LSI	Ilir Meta	4
Party for Justice, Integration and Unity	PDIU	Shpëtim Idrizi	2
Republican Party of Albania	PR	Fatmir Mediu	1
Human Rights Union Party	PBDNJ	Vangjel Dule	1
New Democratic Spirit	FRD	Bamir Topi	new party
Red and Black Alliance	AK	Kreshnik Spahiu	new party

Electoral Administration Process in Albania

The electoral administration process is one of the most contentious topics in Albania and is likely to have an impact on whether the upcoming elections will be deemed 'free and fair'. At the heart of the system is the seven-member Central Elections Commission (CEC) that plays a central role in the management of all elections. Members of the CEC are nominated by the main parliamentary parties and their smaller allies (as determined by the result of a 2003 Agreement between the Democrats and the Socialists). Four members are nominated by the governing parties and three by the opposition. In September 2012, the seven members of the CEC were elected by the Albanian Parliament, with four members from the Democratic Party-led coalition [three from the Democratic Party (PDSH) and one from the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI)] and three from the Socialist-led coalition [two members from the Socialist Party (PSSH) and one member from the Human Rights Union Party (PBDNJ)]. Although the members are nominated by political parties, the CEC is meant to be an independent body. In practice, however, the CEC is treated as a political institution rather than an administrative one. As a result, the electoral process has been deeply influenced by the country's political

elite which has undermined the integrity of the electoral process. Last April, the governing parties' attempts to maintain a majority in the CEC by replacing the member appointed by the LSI illustrated the political significance attributed to this body and the ongoing efforts by parties to seize power.

Albanian Parties Political Struggle over Central Elections Commission

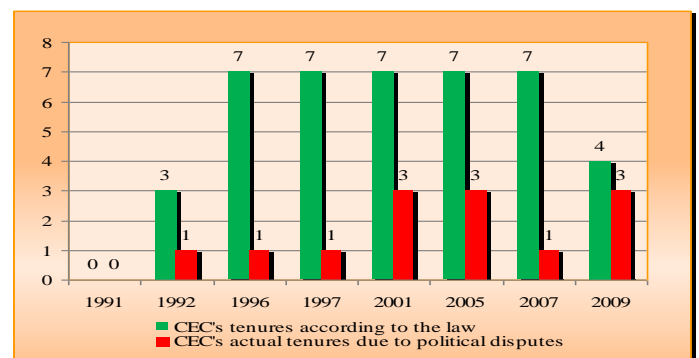
Politics are heating up in Albania as the elections draw closer. At the center of attention is a power struggle between the two major coalitions to take control of the CEC. Last April, PDSH replaced the member of the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI) with a Republican Party (PR) member, after the Democrats' junior partner quit the ruling coalition. The LSI left the government to join the Socialist-led opposition before the June 23rd elections, a move that changed the political balance in the CEC. The opposition condemned the parliament's decision and argued that there was no legal basis to dismiss the commissioner. By contrast, the ruling Democrats claimed that their move in fact restores political balances of the CEC, based on the 2003 agreement which was designed to give ruling parties a majority in the commission.

Following the replacement of the member of LSI two members of the opposition Socialists and one of the Human Rights Union Party (PBDNJ) left the CEC in protest, which effectively stalled the work of the body by leaving only four members. Although many of the more routine tasks only require a simple majority vote, declaring the validity of electoral results requires a full quorum and five-to-two majority. The opposition has so far refused to nominate new commissioners, calling for negotiations to reshuffle the body. Prime Minister Sali Berisha has rejected the idea of negotiations and any change in the CEC. The fresh political row has caused the malfunctioning of the body and the deep concern of the international community.

The current CEC crisis is symptomatic of weaknesses in the functioning of Albania's democracy. During the twenty-three years since the end of communism the political parties have adopted several electoral legal provisions, some of which noticeably unconstitutional, to maintain control of the electoral administration process. The CEC remains divided along party lines and questions have emerged about whether it will be able to oversee a free and fair election. A case in point was the local elections in 2011. The local elections' final result was verified only by CEC members from the ruling majority. When counting was completed in Tirana, with PSSH candidate Edi Rama ahead by ten votes, the CEC delayed announcing the results by the set deadline, as PM Sali Berisha insisted that votes which were cast in the wrong ballot box, and had initially been treated as invalid, should be counted. In an arguably illegal move, the CEC members appointed by the PDSH-led coalition decided to count the disputed ballots, giving the victory to the PDSH candidate Lulzim Basha.

After these developments the CEC had to be reformed. The opposition Socialists claimed that they lost the key mayoral seat of Tirana unfairly on procedural grounds and blamed the loss on the then Chair of CEC Arben Ristani. They pressured for the reshuffle of the CEC and demanded that Ristani would be replaced from head of the body. The political forces reached a compromise and the CEC was recomposed in September 2012, only to fall back to new controversy shortly after, in April 2013. The fact that for more than two decades the CEC's regulations have not been fully implemented demonstrates the deep crisis that exists in this institution, which has shaken public confidence in the integrity of the electoral process; graph 1 shows the discrepancies between

Graph 1: CEC's tenures (in years)



Source: Albanian Council on Foreign Relations

graph 1 shows the discrepancies between

the law-stipulated tenures of the CEC and the actual tenures as a result of parties' conflicts and walk-outs. [Source: "Zgjedhjet dhe Administrimi Zgjedhor në Shqipëri", Albanian Council on Foreign Relations, 2010].

As Albania's Central Election Commission remains in political deadlock, the potential wider impact should not be easily discounted:

- The CEC's legitimacy is seriously weakened, a development that could potentially undermine the country's ability to hold an election deemed fully credible from the standpoint of international democratic standards;
- Albania may lose an opportunity to increase public confidence in the integrity of the electoral process;
- The domination of CEC by PDSH will likely lead once more to the contestation of electoral results by the other political parties, thus continuing a 'tradition' that weakens the foundations of Albania's democracy ([see Albanian Elections Observatory Brief no.1](#)); potential controversies arising after the elections may have to be resolved by the Albanian 'Electoral College', a branch of the Court of Appeals of Tirana;
- The political polarization, which has been on the rise since 2009, will likely continue while Albania's EU membership application may languish progress until its political forces allow independent institutions to function properly.

International Concerns

The CEC crisis has produced fresh concern among the international community. The United States, Albania's greatest ally, and the European Union (EU) have called on the ruling Democrats and the Socialists to negotiate a solution to restore credibility and trust to the CEC and to the electoral process generally. Brussels expressed concern over the political tension in Albania and has urged political parties to ensure there will be free and fair elections to advance the country's bid for EU accession.

When it comes to the US-Albanian relations, the CEC crisis is not the only source of strain. Earlier in the year, Tirana's court rejected murder charges against the officers of the National Guard for the deaths of three opposition protesters on 21 January 2011, a fact that prompted strong reaction from the US Embassy. American Ambassador Alexander Arvizu thought that the development undermined the Albanian judicial system and the perception it could deliver justice in an impartial and transparent manner. The Tirana Court reacted by accusing Ambassador Arvizu of meddling in Albania's internal affairs. Meanwhile, Ambassador Arvizu openly criticised the nationalistic rhetoric of the centennial celebrations, a move that was widely interpreted as a critique directed towards PM Berisha himself.

Political Coalitions for June Parliamentary elections

The two largest political camps in Albania, the governing Democratic Party of Prime Minister Sali Berisha and the Edi Rama's main opposition Socialist Party have announced their election coalition agreements for the upcoming parliamentary election. Berisha will lead a center-right conservative coalition of 25 political parties, while Rama will lead a centre-left coalition comprising 37 parties (see Annex). Two new political parties have opted out of joining any political coalition: the centre-right New Democratic Spirit (FRD) of former President Bamir Topi and the nationalist Red and Black Alliance (AK) of Kreshnik Spahiu. 66 political parties (up from 34 parties in 2009), three independent candidates and two coalitions (down from four in 2009) will participate in the election.

The PDSH-led 'Alliance for Employment, Welfare and Integration'

The Democratic Party and its allies formalized the pre-electoral coalition under the name 'Alliance for Employment, Welfare and Integration'. This alliance led by PDSH consists of 25 right-wing and centrist parties, including Berisha's traditional partners: the Republican Party and Nikolle Lesi's Albanian Christian Democratic Movement (LDK). New additions include the Chams' Party for Justice Integration and Unity (PDIU) and Nard Ndoka's Christian Democratic Party (PDK), which in the 2011 local elections were allied with the Socialists, and the Movement for National Development (LZHK). The Democrats hope that these new additions will counterbalance the loss of votes due to LSI's switch of coalitions. They stress that their coalition includes historical right-wing political parties known for their stable electoral base and strong electoral influence in areas such as Tirana and Elbasan.

The PSSH-led 'Alliance for a European Albania'

The Socialist Party formed its 'Alliance for a European Albania' coalition by signing agreements with forty political parties (which fell to 37 partners after some parties failed to meet the legal criteria for registering with the CEC). The most important addition to the coalition of the left is the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI). This opens a new chapter in the cooperation between these two biggest left-wing political parties. LSI was formed as splinter party from PSSH in 2004, quickly establishing itself as the third force in Albanian politics; it assumed the role of 'kingmaker' and tipped balance of power in subsequent elections. For example, LSI played a significant role in the Socialists' defeat in the June 2005 elections. Later, LSI played an important role in the 2007 re-election of Rama as mayor of Tirana for a third term. In 2009 the two parties went again their separate ways and LSI became the decisive addition to the new government formed by Sali Berisha and PDSH. Following pressure by the Socialist International for the unification of the left in Albania, the two left-wing parties re-established ties last month. The reconciliation between the two leaders Edi Rama and Ilir Meta, after a long period of fierce rivalry, has puzzled public opinion, but in Albanian politics such abrupt turns are not uncommon. LSI's votes will prove crucial for the few additional seats that the Socialists hope will be enough to bring the left back to power after the June elections. Additionally, Socialists rejoined forces with traditional partners, such as the Social Democrats of Skënder Gjinushi and Paskal Milo and the Greek minority's Human Rights Union Party (PBDNJ). LSI and PBDNJ are the only PSSH's partners that are represented in the current Albanian parliament.



Going it Alone: The FRD and AK

The center-right FRD may pose a threat to the PDSH power base. The party of former president Bamir Topi was created as an expression of dissatisfaction within the right-wing electorate and now presents itself as the purer conservative alternative to Berisha's politics. Under such circumstances FRD could not be part of either the coalition of the right or of that of the left. Bamir Topi's decision to go alone in the June elections may significantly alter the political landscape; even in the case that FDR does not secure the necessary votes to win parliamentary seats it may still negatively affect the electoral performance of the ruling coalition.



PDSH may also lose influence to the nationalists of the Red and Black Alliance (AK). The PDSH, traditionally the major party favored more by the 'patriotic' bloc of voters, is criticized over decisions that some view as detrimental to the national interests, such as the closed-door negotiations about the sea-border demarcation with Greece. The Red and Black Alliance may also make inroads with Socialist voters, since many ordinary Albanians commonly view PSSH as 'soft' on national issues, pointing to the close bonds with Greece that the party has enjoyed.

Change or More of the Same after the June Elections? The Analysis of Four Electoral Districts

Given the delicate electoral balance between majority and opposition, the PSSH-LSI agreement is potentially a 'game changing' development. The Socialists hope that the addition of LSI's votes will tip the balance in key races giving the opposition enough marginal seats to overthrow PDSH from government. In addition, Bamir Topi's new party FRD is also likely to sap votes from PDSH. On their part, the Democrats hope that the inclusion of the Christian Democratic Party (PDK) and the Movement for National Development (LZHK) in their coalition will partly make up for the hemorrhage of LSI and FRD votes. If the 2009 election results are any indicator, there are indeed a number of seats that will be closely fought between the centre-right and the centre-left coalitions. We present here a brief analysis of likely changes in four key Albanian electoral districts.

 Tiranë	Votes (2009)	%	Mandates (2009)	 Berat	Votes (2009)	%	Mandates (2009)
PDSH	161,332	42.48%	15	PDSH	21,805	26.72%	3
PR	6,131	1.61%	1	PR	4,179	5.12%	0
PDIU*	1,671	0.44%	0	PDIU	94	0.12%	0
LZHK	4,439	1.17%	0	LZHK	130	0.16%	0
PDK	1,826	0.48%	0	PDK	124	0.15%	0
PSSH	162,757	42.85%	15	PSSH	39,390	48.28%	4
LSI	17,552	4.62%	1	LSI	8,844	10.84%	1
PBDNJ	2,941	0.77%	0	PBDNJ	126	0.15%	0

In 2009, the two main parties PDSH and PSSH were neck and neck in the electoral district of Tirana. PDSH's allies LSI and PR won one seat each and thus the overall ratio of seats between the government and the Socialist opposition was 17-15. LSI's cross to the opposition strengthens the Socialist camp, while FRD is expected to win many right-wing votes in Tirana. LZHK and PDK are unlikely to counterbalance the loss of LSI and FRD votes, since the latter two parties are expected to have in Tirana among their strongest showings in the country. The changes increase the possibilities that the Socialist coalition will win one more seat at the expense of the Democrats and their allies, thus changing the ratio of seats to 17-15 for the opposition.	In the electoral district of Berat, the left-wing coalition has possibilities to increase its electoral results and to gain one more seat. In 2009, LSI had in the Berat district its strongest performance and as a result its entry in the opposition coalition is likely to significantly strengthen the anti-PDSH forces. LZHK and PDK had in 2009 very weak performance in the Berat electoral district and they not seem capable to help the Democrats to hold their forces. An optimistic but feasible scenario for the Socialist coalition would be to change the ratio of seats to 6-2 at the expense of the Democrats.
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 Elbasan	Votes (2009)	%	Mandates (2009)	 Vlorë	Votes (2009)	%	Mandates (2009)
PDSH	57,035	37.19%	7	PDSH	30,310	28.59%	4
PR	3,253	2.12%	0	PR	1,222	1.15%	0
PDIU	931	0.61%	0	PDIU	4,932	4.65%	1
LZHK	371	0.24%	0	LZHK	350	0.33%	0

PKD	2,441	1.59%	0	PKD	1,807	1.70%	0
PSSH	67,653	44.12%	7	PSSH	47,284	44.60%	6
LSI	7,016	4.58%	0	LSI	3,810	3.59%	0
PBDNJ	1,363	0.61%	0	PBDNJ	6,068	5.72%	1

In the electoral district of Elbasan the margin between PSSH and PDSH was in 2009 above 10,000 votes, but the 14 seats were evenly split (7-7). The Socialist-led coalition hopes to gain here one more seat at the expense of PDSH (ratio of seats 8-6). LSI's percentage in 2009 was slightly below its national average, but it will still likely contribute a good amount of votes to its new coalition. Much will depend on whether PDSH manages to maintain its numbers and to what extent it will lose votes to FRD.

In the electoral district of Vlorë, the PSSH and its ally PBDNJ won 7 seats in 2009 as opposed to 5 seats of the ruling forces (PDSH and PDIU). The two minor parties, PBDNJ (Greek minority) and PDIU (Cham community), are quite strong in this electoral district and their performance will be important for the margin of votes between the two coalitions on June 23rd. Additionally, observers believe that some independent candidates, including a locally-influential renegade former PSSH MP, may also attract noteworthy number of votes in this district.

Note: PDSH=Democratic Party of Albania, PSSH=Socialist Party of Albania, LSI=Socialist Movement for Integration, PR=Republican Party of Albania, PBDNJ=Human Right Union Party, *PDIU=Party for Justice, Integration and Unity [In 2009 the Party for Justice and Integration was in coalition with the Democrats. In 2011 it joined the Party for Integration and Unity and together they formed the Party for Justice, Integration and Unity (PDIU)], LZHK=Movement for National Development, PKD=Christian Democratic Party of Albania.

Source: Central Elections Commission and Mapo Magazine <http://www.mapo.al/2013/04/27/koalicionet-dueli-final-ne-shifra/>

Conclusion

The problematic functioning of the CEC, the party-influenced nominations of its members, and the domination of the ruling majority in its functioning have weakened the opposition's confidence in the electoral administration, giving it reason to contest the electoral results that will be announced after June 23. Albania has yet to hold elections that meet international standards, with all seven parliamentary elections since the collapse of Communism in the early 1990s plagued by allegations of ballot-stuffing and intimidation (*see Albanian Elections Observatory Brief no.1*). PM Berisha has solemnly guaranteed the fairness of the upcoming general elections. This is a crucial test of democratization and will be closely watched by the EU and the international community. However, polarisation and inflammatory rhetoric allow little room for political dialogue and compromises that could lead to the success of the electoral process. The government's promises of a smooth electoral process can be realised only if the electoral administration works properly. But, two decades after the fall of Communism, Albania still finds itself with few functioning independent institutions, and the CEC is not among them. As the key national priority of organising free and fair elections is held back by the lack of political dialogue, public trust in politicians is reaching rock bottom. Albanians are desperately in need of political representatives and democratic institutions they can trust.

Annex: Full list of political coalitions for June parliamentary elections

	Alliance for a European Albania	Alliance for Employment, Welfare and Integration	
Participated in 2009 general elections	The Socialist Party of Albania (PSSH)	Political Parties Existed in the same Coalition in 2009	
	Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI)		
	Unity for Human Rights Party (PBDNJ)		
	Social Democracy Party (P.D.S)		
	Social-Democratic Party (PSD)		
	Law and Justice Party (PLiDr)		
	Christian Democratic Alliance (ADK)		
	G 99 Party (G 99)		
Participated in 2011 local elections	National Arber Alliance (AAK)	The Democratic Party of Albania (PDSH)	
	Albanian Future Party (PASH)	The Republican Party of Albania (PR)	
	Albanian Republican Union Party (PBR)	Environmentalist Agrarian Party (P.A.A.)	
	Democratic Party for Integration and Prosperity (PDIP)	The Christian Democratic Movement of Albania (L.D.K.)	
	New Tolerance of Albania Party (PTR e Shqipërisë)	Legality Movement Party (PLL)	
	Green Party of Albania (PGJ)	Democratic Alliance Party (AD)	
	Reformed Labor Party (P.P.SH.R)	Liberal Democratic Union Party (BLD)	
	Party for Democratic Reforms (P.R.D.SH)	National Democratic Front Party (PBKD)	
	Party for National Unity (PUK)	The Party of the Albanian National Front (P.B.K.)	
	Party for Migrants' Rights (P.M.D.E)	Alliance for Democracy and Solidarity Party (ADS)	
	Moderate Socialist Party (PSM)	Time of Albania Party (P.O.SH)	
	The Road of Freedom Party (PRRL)	Macedonians' Alliance for European Integration (A.M.I.E)	
	People with Disabilities Party (PPAK)	New European Democracy Party (P.D.R.E)	
	People's Alliance Party (AP)	New Party of Denied Rights ((P.D.M – e Re)	
National Conciliation Party (P.P.K)	New comers Political Parties		
Environmentalist Party (PA)		Movement for National Development (LZHK)	
Alliance for Equality and European Justice Party (ABDE)		Party for Justice, Integration and Unity (PDIU)	
Albanian Affairs Party (PÇSH)		The Christian Democratic Party of Albania (PDK)	
Communist Party of Albania November 8 (PKSH-8 Nëntori)		The Albanian True Path Party (P.R.V.SH.)	
Christian-Democrat Party (PKDSH)		Albanian Democratic Union Party (PBD)	
Labor Party of Albania (P.P.SH)		Conservative Party of Albania (Kons)	
Albanians' Movement for Justice (LDSH)		Denied Rights Party (P.D.M.)	
Right-Wing Liberal Thought Party (MDL)		Ethnic Greek Minority for the Future (MEGA)	
Democratic Movement for Change Party (PLDN)		People's Union of Pensioners Party (PBPPSH)	
The Labor Movement Party of Albania (P.L.P.SH)	Political Parties Outside Coalitions		
Social Labor party of Albania (PSP)		Movement for New Albania Party (PLSHR)	
Albanian Homeland Party (PSHA)		The Party of the Albanian Emigration (PESH)	
Communist Party of Albania (PKSH)		Red and Black Alliance (AK)	
The Real Socialist Party (PSVg1) *		New Democratic Spirit (FRD)	
		Union for Justice and Development (LDP)	
		The Christian Democratic People's Party (PPKD)	
		Independent Candidates	
			Dritan Prifti (Fier)
			Arben Malaj (Vlorë)
		Laureta Gjoni (Vlorë)	

*Note: PSVg1 joined the Socialist Party

Sources

- “Zgjedhjet dhe Administrimi Zgjedhor në Shqipëri”, Albanian Council on Foreign Relations, 2010
- “Pre-election Assessment Mission to Albania”, National Democratic Institute (NDI), March 22, 2013
- ELIAMEP’s Briefing Notes
- In addition, ELIAMEP’s Albanian Elections Observatory is regularly monitoring the official websites of the Central Elections Commission and the political parties, and has also benefited from analyses in Albanian electronic and print media.

Check related analysis:

- ✎ *Introduction to Albanian Politics and Elections – Albanian Elections Observatory Brief No. 1, available at: <http://www.eliamep.gr/?p=15623>*
- ✎ *Signaling Change in Albanian Politics: Edi Rama’s visit to South Serbia’s Presevo Valley, available at: <http://www.eliamep.gr/?p=10566>*
- ✎ *The Albanian Politics: The Prehistory of a coming Political Clash, available at: <http://www.eliamep.gr/?p=10465>*
- ✎ *Αλβανική Πολιτική: Το ίδιο έργο από την αρχή, available at: <http://www.eliamep.gr/?p=10031>*
- ✎ *Τα νέα Πολιτικά Κόμματα στην Αλβανία και η Αναδιάταξη της Αλβανικής Πολιτικής Σκηνής, available at: <http://www.eliamep.gr/?p=11453>*



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