

## Elections Results in Albania and the New Coalition Government

### Introduction

On June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2013, Albania held its eighth parliamentary elections since the fall of Communism. Albanians voted resoundingly for a rotation of power through an electoral process deemed by the international community as free and quite fair. In an unusual gesture in the ever-squabbling Albanian politics, the defeated candidate of the elections congratulated the winner. Albania's outgoing Prime Minister, Sali Berisha, conceded his defeat, opening the way for a smooth handover of power to the Socialist Party (PSSH) leader, Edi Rama. In more than two decades as a young democracy, this is the first time Albania is having a handover of power without violence or allegations of vote rigging (see [Albanian Elections Observatory Brief No. 1](#)). The ballot boxes brought about a few surprising results, while also giving impetus to the evolution of the party and the political system. In this briefing we analyze the results of the elections, based on the official results announced by the Central Election Commission (CEC), with special focus on the voting behavior of certain segments of the electorate. In addition, this briefing outlines the main shifts in policy-making that can be expected as a result of the election outcome, as well as the new government's priorities and the challenges ahead.

### Albania marks a new era by burying ghost of elections past

These elections were seen by international observers as an important test for Albania's democracy. Both the EU and the United States exerted great pressure on the country's political elite to show their willingness and ability to hold free and fair elections. Although it entered the pre-election period in a highly polarized environment Albania held the elections in a relatively calm environment. Senior EU officials praised the "overall orderly manner" in which the elections were conducted, while international observers, including the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), declared the poll the soundest held in Albania to date. There were isolated incidents, such as the shooting on election-day which left one opposition activist dead in Laç, but the elections were still orderly by historical standards in Albania. Although lengthy, the vote-counting process was executed in a diligent manner.

Arguably, however, it was the wide margin between the two coalitions, rather than the maturity of the political class, that led to the smooth post-elections setting and power handover. Several complaints were filed with the Central Election Commission (CEC). In one case, CEC decided in favor of a Democratic Party's (PDSH) complaint, ruling that preliminary results were wrong in the northern electoral zone of Lezhë and a seat earlier awarded to the Socialists should instead be given to the Democrats and the left-wing coalition's mandates fell to 83. As a result, the new government will need to attract at least one opposition MP if it wants to pursue any changes in the electoral law and the Constitution, since such changes require a majority of 84. Several other disputes involving results in three electoral zones of Shkodër, Lezhë and Kukës did not further change the overall distribution of mandates. Overall, it took Albanian authorities almost one month and a half to announce the full completion of the electoral process, but in the end this was done without large problems.

The certification of the election results and the allocation of the mandates were done by the Electoral College - a branch of the Court of Appeals of Tirana. The seven-member CEC did not have the five necessary votes to declare the validity of

the electoral result due to a pre-electoral political dispute that left the body with only four members, all representatives of the outgoing government (see [Albanian Elections Observatory Brief No. 2](#)). While important, the dispute over the CEC did not in the end affect the outcome of the elections and did not bring about new tensions, as it was initially being feared. All in all, these elections showed some progress, with a much calmer political atmosphere compared to the 2009 poll. Nonetheless, the situation remains volatile and in need of efforts by all sides to depoliticize the electoral process and relevant institutions.

## A summary of the results

The left-wing, PSSH-led coalition gained a clear victory, with 57.63 percent of the vote over the PDSH coalition's 39.46 percent. Contrary to the 2009 elections when the PDSH and the PSSH were head to head on vote share (the difference was around 10,000 votes in favour of the Socialists), this year's elections were a landslide. The June 23<sup>rd</sup> parliamentary elections increased the margin between Albania's two main political parties to 185,034 votes. With 41.36% of the vote, PSSH consolidated its position as the country's biggest political party. Despite this increase, the Socialist Party did not increase its share of seats in the Parliament. It was, however, PSSH's main coalition partner, the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI) of former Prime Minister Ilir Meta that achieved a remarkable breakthrough by increasing its share of the vote to 10.46 percent, as compared to 4.85 percent in 2009. The Democratic Party was the biggest loser of these elections. Not only did it lose almost 10 percent of the vote share, the Democratic Party lost some of its strongholds, especially in the north. The party experienced a decline of more than 82,000 votes.

**Table 1. Parliamentary Elections in Albania - Results**

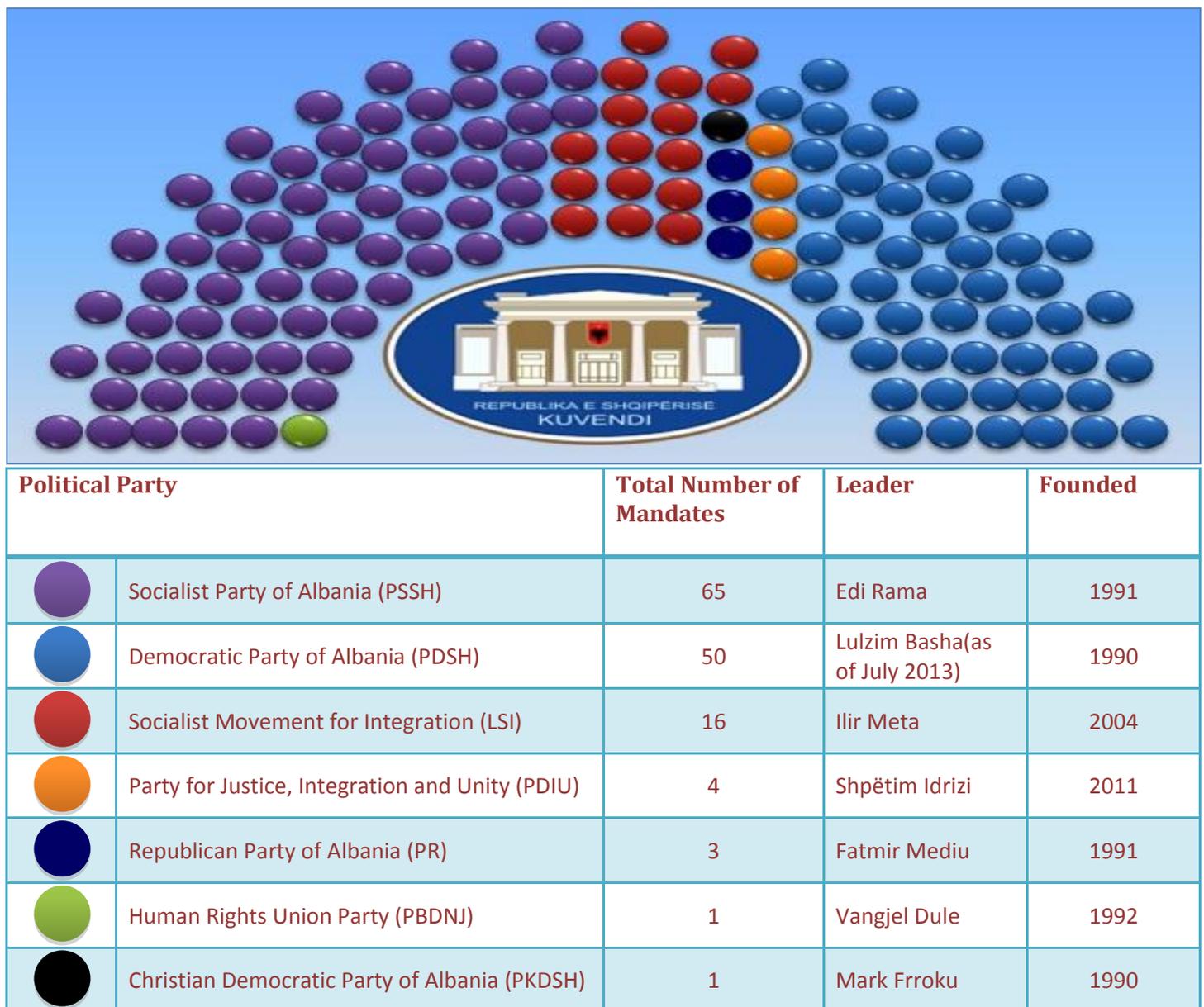
Coalition/Parties	2009			2013			Seats Change
	Votes	%	Seats	Votes	%	Seats	
<b>Alliance for a European Albania</b>				<b>993,904</b>	<b>57.63</b>	<b>83</b>	
Socialist Party of Albania	620,586	40.85	65	713,407	41.36	65	(-)
Socialist Movement for Integration	73,678	4.85	4	180,470	10.46	16	(+12)
Human Rights Union Party	18,078	1.19	1	14,722	0.85	1	(-)
Christian Democratic Party	n/a	n/a	n/a	7,993	0.46	1	n/a
<b>Alliance for Employment, Welfare and Integration</b>				<b>680,677</b>	<b>39.46</b>	<b>57</b>	
Democratic Party of Albania	610,463	40.18	68	528,373	30.63	50	(-18)
Republican Party of Albania	31,990	2.11	1	52,168	3.02	3	(+2)
Party for Justice, Integration and Unity	14,477	0.95	1	44,957	2.61	4	(+3)
<b>Main parties running individually</b>							
New Democratic Spirit	n/a	n/a	n/a	29,310	1.70	0	n/a
Red and Black Alliance	n/a	n/a	n/a	10,196	0.59	0	n/a

Smaller parties made some spectacular gains in these elections as well. In 2009 elections a number of parties with parliamentary representation in the 2005-2009 period failed to enter the parliament, while other small parties such as LSI and the Republican Party (PR) lost many seats. Now four years later the Republican Party managed to make gains in comparison to 2009 and secured two more seats in the parliament. The Party for Justice, Integration and Unity (PDIU), which represents the Cham Community, made a spectacular performance by increasing its share of the vote from 0.95 percent in 2009 to 2.61 in 2013. The Human Rights Union Party, which generally represents the Greek minority in Albania, was the only small parliamentary party that experienced a decline of vote share, losing around 0.34 percent. Kreshnik Spahiu's nationalist Red and Black Alliance (AK) and the New Democratic Spirit (FRD), two new

political parties unaffiliated with the main coalitions, failed to impress voters. AK received 10,196 votes and an insignificant 0.59 percent. FRD, a center-right PDSH splinter party led by former President Bamir Topi, fared better by securing 29,310 votes, which is 1.70 percent. However, because the regional proportional electoral system counts mandates by electoral zone rather than at the national level, FRD could not translate their electoral performance into mandates and secure seats in the parliament. This electoral system benefits other small parties with regional strength, such as the Human Rights Union Party and the Christian Democratic Party. The latter, attracting many votes from the Catholics of the north, had a total of only 7,993 votes at the national level but entered the parliament by capturing 5.54 percent of the vote in the electoral zone of Shkodër.

In these elections, seven political parties entered the Albanian Parliament (see figure 1). There were a total of 66 parties running and all but four were grouped into two electoral alliances. Two candidates ran as independents. (for the full list of political parties see [Albanian Elections Observatory Brief No. 2](#))

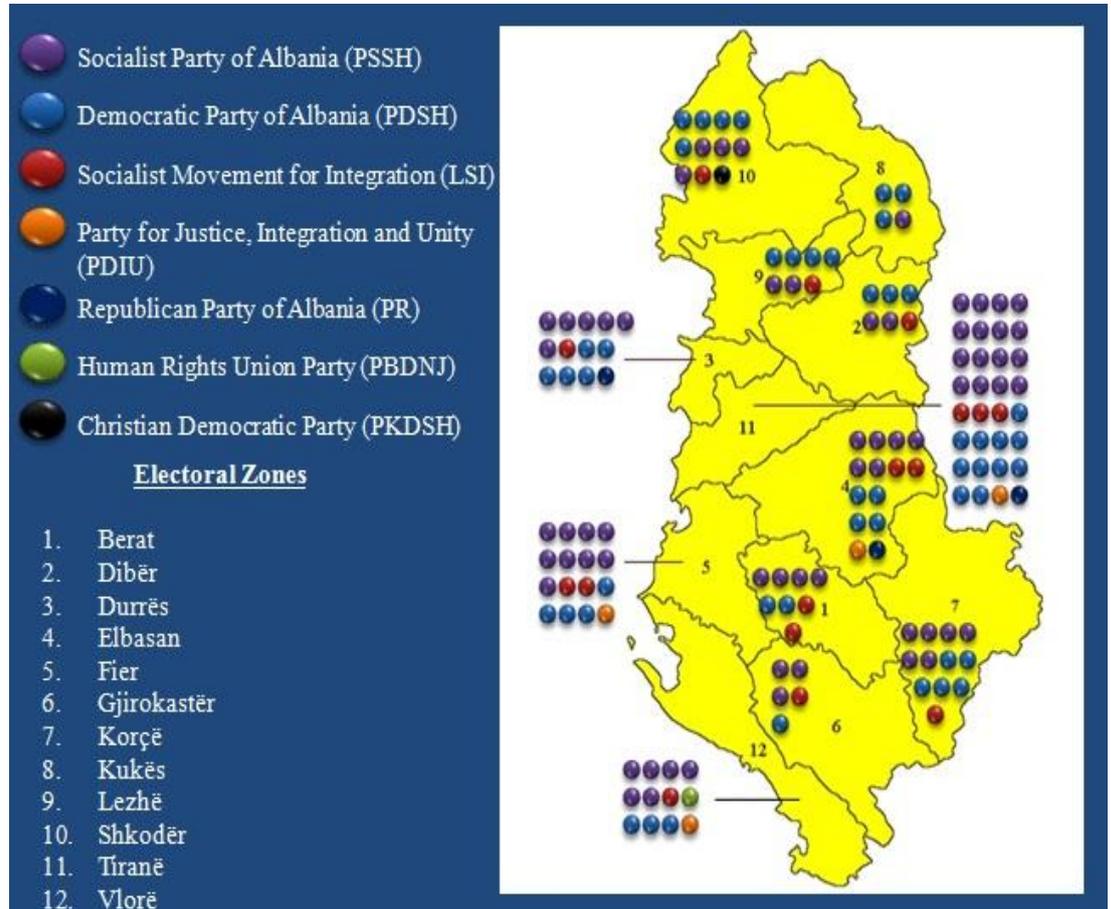
**Figure 1. Seats of the Political Parties in the New Parliament**



Albania will be governed by a coalition known as the “Alliance for a European Albania” led by the Socialist Party (PSSH) and three minor parties: the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI), the Human Rights Union Party (PBDNJ) and the Christian Democratic Party (PKDSH). The coalition has gained 83 seats in the 140-member parliament; easily surpassing the 71 seats needed for a majority (see Figure 2). The rival center-right “Alliance for Employment, Welfare and Integration” of outgoing Prime Minister Sali Berisha won 57 mandates (50 for the Democratic Party and 7 for its two minor partners).

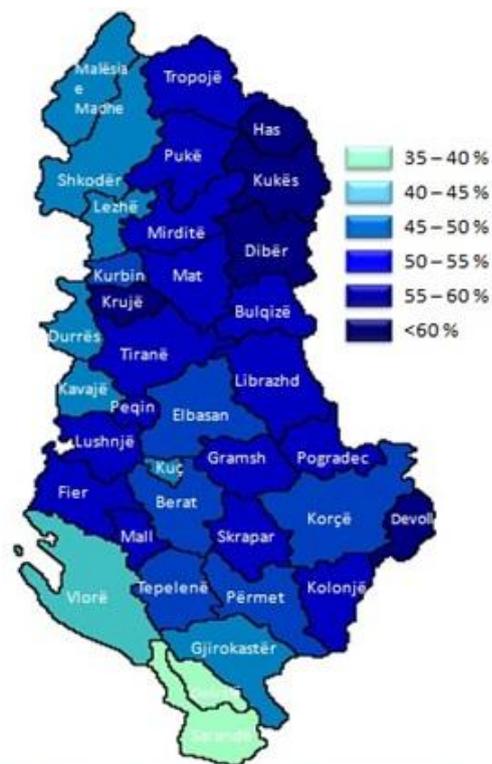
**Figure 2. Distribution of Mandates in Country’s 12 Electoral Zones – 2013 Parliamentary Elections**

These results give the left-wing parties enough parliamentary seats for pursuing substantial changes to policy. However, given Albania’s highly polarized political scene, this is a dangerous development that could put the country back to instability. The PSSH-PDSH rivalry could lead to a dysfunctional relationship between the government and the opposition, as was the country’s perilous experience during the 2009-2013 period. Unilateral decisions on critical reforms where national consensus is needed could bring back autocratic governmental behavior. It is yet to be seen how the new ruling majority will use its advantage.



Voter turnout was 53.50 percent – the highest percentage in five elections (see Map 1). The lowest turnout was recorded in the southern part of the country, especially in the districts of Sarandë (37.20%) and Delvinë (38.84%), while the highest turnout was recorded in the northern district of Has in the electoral zone of Kukës (63.33%). Despite the slight increase, the overall voter turnout remains low, compared at least to the very high percentages recorded in the first post-communist decade. A significant proportion of the population remains disillusioned with politics in Albania and maintains little hope for a better future.

Map 1. 2013 Parliamentary Elections – Turnout



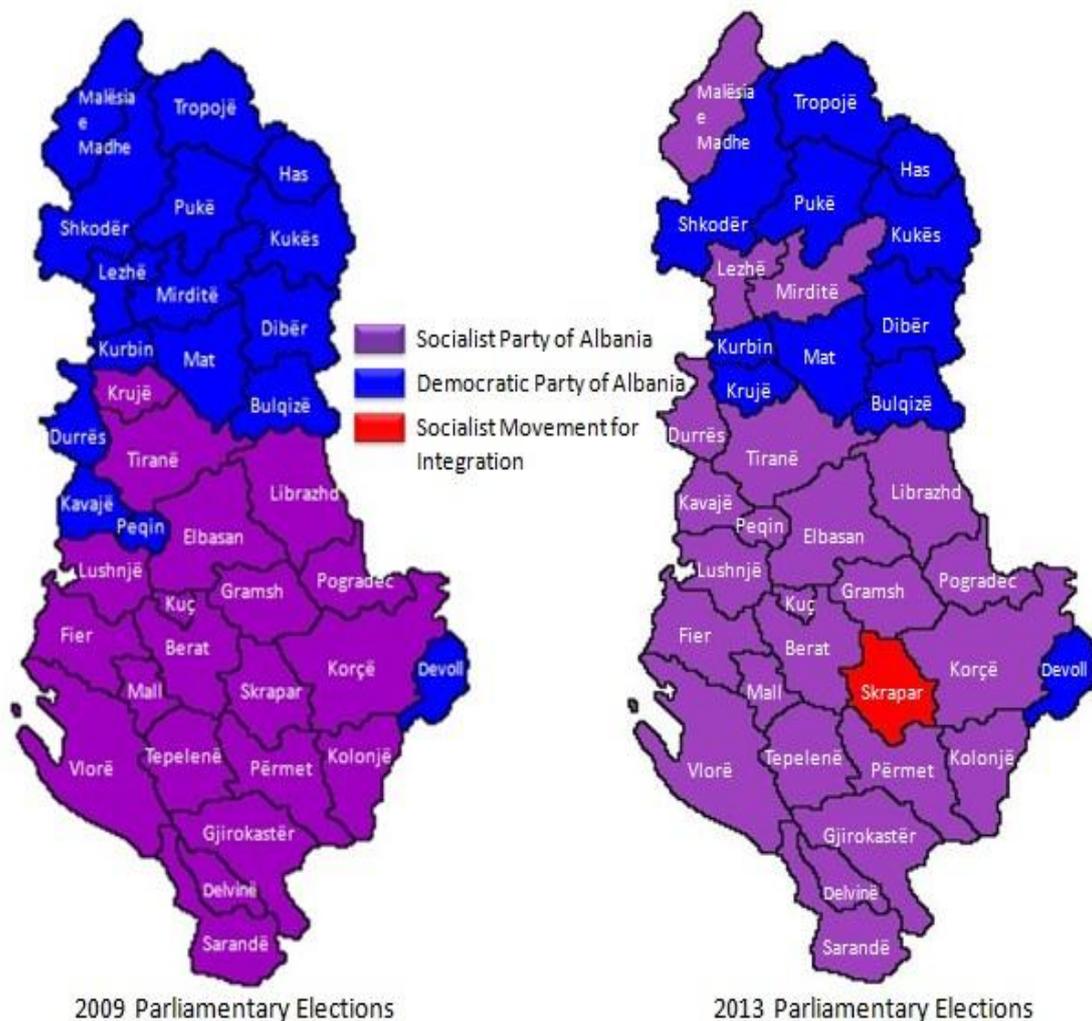
Year	1991	1992	1996	1997	2001	2005	2009	2013
Turnout	98.92%	91.50%	89.08%	72.56%	54.95%	48.73%	50.77%	53.50%

## The anti-Berisha and anti-PDSH vote

After eight years of rule by the Prime Minister Sali Berisha, Albanian voters firmly refused PDSH another term in office. The outcome was more or less anticipated, but few predicted as massive of a withdrawal of voters' support to PDSH. The results must be interpreted as more than a mere vote for rotation of power; it was a vote for change and a protest against the PDSH-ruled government. Many factors seem to have played a role in voters' electoral behavior. First of all, Berisha was punished for his growing authoritarianism and his arrogance, which was present not only in his efforts to improperly control or influence independent state institutions but also in his political language. For many Albanians, Berisha became the personification of old politics and the main obstacle for the country's further development. Second, Albanians were also tired of weak rule of law and what they see as 'capture' of the public administration by militants of the governing party. Third, Berisha was punished for the government's failed economic policies. Many charged the ruling party for economically benefiting small groups with close ties to the leadership, while the economic situation of ordinary Albanians was getting worse by the day. Last but not least, Albanians have been increasingly dissatisfied with the high level of corruption in Albania. Although Berisha came into power in 2005 on an anti-corruption ticket, his government did not prove immune to this malaise of Albanian public life. One of the most dramatic failures of Berisha's 'clean hands' policy was the way it handled corruption within its own ranks. Voters condemned the fact that justice was not delivered in cases such as the Gërdec explosion and the January 2011 anti-government demonstration in which four protesters died.

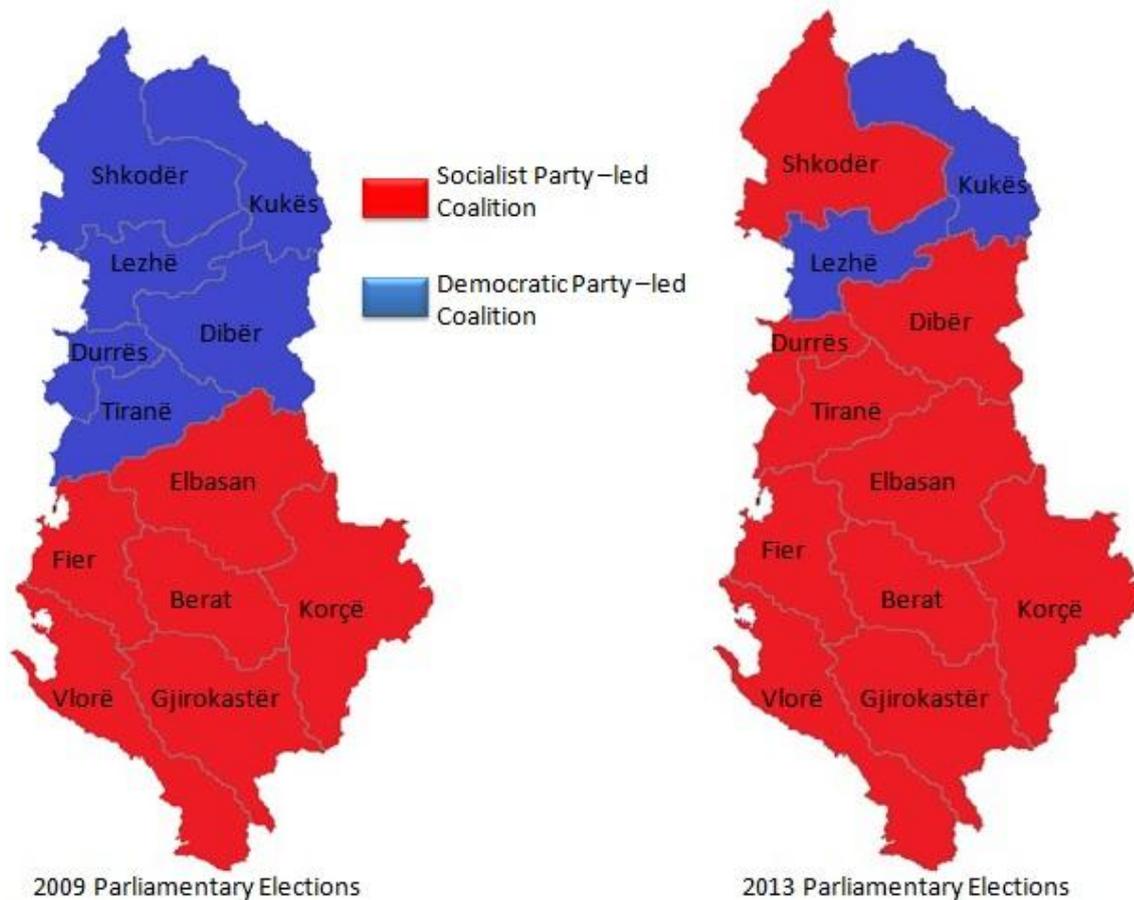
The loud vote for change altered political trends that are traditionally seen as key constants in Albanian politics. Nothing is more characteristic than the weakening of the traditional north-south divide in electoral behavior. Traditionally, the country's south supports the left, while the north is dominated by the right. In 2009 and 2005 elections, for example, there was a clear north-south electoral split (see Map 3). The right-wing coalition lost electoral zones almost across the country from North to South and from East to West, giving to the left-wing coalition a victory of unparalleled proportions. Out of 12 electoral zones, the Democrats stood in clear advantage only in Kukës, while their difference from the Socialists in Lezhë was only 0.38 percent. From the country's 36 districts the Socialist Party won in 24, while the Democratic Party only in 11 districts – 5 less compared to 2009. The Socialist Movement for Integration won in the district of Skrapar in the electoral zone of Berat (see Map 2).

**Map 2. Political Parties Performance in Country's 36 Districts**



The right-wing coalition lost even in traditional strongholds, such as the electoral zone (although not the district of) Shkodër, while PDSH lost several districts, such as Durrës, Kavajë in central Albania and Lezhë, Mirditë and Malësia e Madhe in the north.

Map 3. Political Coalitions Performance in Country's 12 Electoral Zones



The PDSH lost also in all south and central Albania districts with the exception of the district of Devoll, in the electoral zone of Korçë. The PDSH got an absolute majority – more than 50 percent – only in the district of Tropjë, Berisha's home. In the south-west district of Sarandë and Vlorë, PDSH scored below 20 percent, in most of the central districts it scored between 20-30 percent, and received 30-40 percent in most of the northern districts (see Map 4).

Map 4. PDSH vote share in the electoral race (2013)



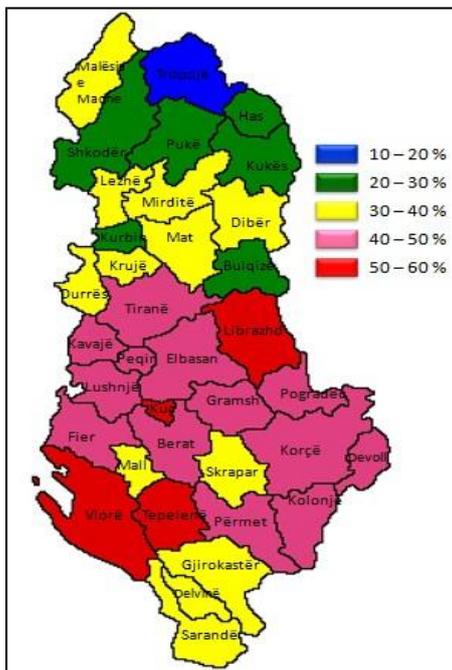
## The electoral paradox

However, the electoral results also present a paradox. On the one hand Albanians punished the government of Sali Berisha. On the other hand they rewarded Ilir Meta's LSI, until recently Berisha's junior governmental partner. Rather than embracing PSSH or smaller alternatives such as FRD or AK, they strengthened LSI, turning it into the most powerful kingmaker in the history of Albanian politics. Meta has his strongest support in his home district of Skrapar (43.49%) and in the district of Gjirokastër (21.2%). Furthermore, LSI has strong support among the aspirant middle class that is growing in Tirana and the coastal cities. It also did well by scoring more than 10 percent in some districts in the north of the country (see Map 5). It was LSI that managed to attract the votes of the pragmatic centrist electorate.

What accounts for LSI's successful performance? Some analysts attributed the performance to the long presence of LSI in government, which has allowed it to build clientelistic networks and alliances with the business world. These networks and connections helped LSI immensely in this period of transition to a new political landscape. Meta also scored points with his decision to abandon Berisha and re-establish ties with the Socialist Party. His move was rewarded by leftist and anti-Berisha voters who wanted to see the left united. In addition, the electoral system's advantages to smaller parties within coalitions also advantaged LSI.

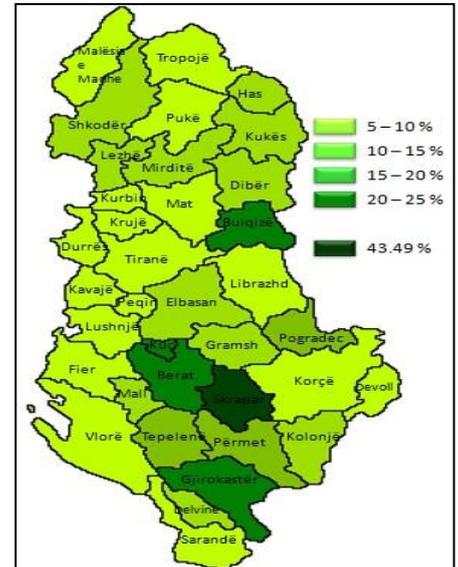
LSI's success raises the question about the performance of the Socialists. The results show that voters did not wholeheartedly embrace PSSH as the alternative power for change. The party's results did not depart much from the 2009 performance; it had a very strong showing in traditional Socialist bastions, some increase in other areas, but no massive gains from disenchanted PDSH voters. Still, as a result of the dramatic fall of PDSH's vote share, PSSH is unequivocally a winner. The Socialist Party sustained a clear victory in the majority of country's districts. Its highest scores (more than 50 percent) were recorded in Vlorë, Tepelenë, Kuçovë and Librazhd (all in the centre and south). High scores were recorded also in the major urban centers of the country as well as in most large municipalities. The Socialists' percentages are in the mid to high 40s in most of the central and south districts. PSSH also managed to surpass the 30 percent threshold in some of the districts of the country's north, such as Krujë, Mat and Dibër, while it fell below 20 percent only in Tropojë, Berisha's home district.

Map 6. PSSH vote share in the electoral race (2013)



expected to deliver on its promises in the face of an increased demand for an accountable and responsive government.

Map 5. LSI vote share in the electoral race (2013)



## The new coalition government promises to introduce radical changes

The two winners of the elections, PSSH and LSI, will govern together. The new coalition government, with Edi Rama as prime minister and LSI's leader Ilir Meta as Speaker of the parliament, has emphasized the need to offer Albania a new model in policy making and parliamentary life inspired by the spirit of collaboration. Under the slogan, "Everything we do will be different", the new leadership has already announced radical changes:

- The new Albanian cabinet has 19 ministries, four more than the outgoing government of Prime Minister Sali Berisha, while female representation in the cabinet is the highest in Albanian history. Some of the existing ministries will undergo extensive reform, while some other will be split in two based on government's priorities and the needs of the country. The new government will also include two new ministers for local government who will deal with the gaps between the local administration and the central government and a minister for relations with the parliament. We present the changes, as they were announced by the new coalition partners, in Table 2.
- The new government introduced the principle of separation between the executive and the legislature – no MP may be a member of the new government. Rama did not apply this principle to himself.
- Significant changes are expected in tax policy. In place of the 10 percent flat tax rate of the Democrats, the new ruling coalition is suggesting the introduction of a progressive income tax system, which will lower taxes for low-and-middle income employees at the expense of higher income earners.

**Table 2. Albanian Cabinet Changes**

2009 - 2013	2013 – 2017
Prime Ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Prime Minister: Edi Rama (PSSH)</b></li> <li>• <b>Deputy Prime Minister: Nikol Peleshi (PSSH)</b></li> </ul>
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Its departments will be reduced and it will undergo deep reform. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Minister of Foreign Affairs: Ditimir Bushati (PSSH)</b></li> </ul>
Ministry of Interior Affairs	Its departments will be reduced and it will undergo deep reform. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Interior Minister: Saimir Tahiri (PSSH)</b></li> </ul>
Ministry of Health	It will maintain the same competences and will also receive the portfolio of consumer protection. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Minister of Health: Ilir Beqja (PSSH)</b></li> </ul>
Ministry of Defence	Its departments will be reduced and it will undergo deep reform. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Minister of Defence: Mimi Kodheli (PSSH)</b></li> </ul>
Ministry of European Integration	The Ministry of European Integration will assume a new role and powers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Minister of Integration: Klajda Gjoshja (LSI)</b></li> </ul>
Ministry of Finance	Its departments will be reduced and it will undergo deep reform. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Minister of Finance: Shkëlqim Cani (PSSH)</b></li> </ul>
Ministry of Economy, Trade and Energy	This Ministry will be split in two: the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Entrepreneurship and the Ministry of Energy and Industry. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Minister of Economic Development, Commerce and Enterprise: Arben Ahmetaj (PSSH)</b></li> <li>• <b>Minister of Energy and Industry: Damian Gjoknuri (PSSH)</b></li> </ul>
Ministry of Justice	This Ministry does not change much in terms of competences, but it will undergo extensive reform. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Minister of Justice: Nasip Naço (LSI)</b></li> </ul>
Ministry of Public Works, Transportation and Telecommunications	This Ministry will be divided into the Ministry of Transport and Development of the Infrastructure and the Ministry of Urban Development and Tourism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Minister of Transport and Development of the Infrastructure: Edmond Haxhinasto (LSI)</b></li> <li>• <b>Minister of Urban Development and Tourism: Eglantina Gjermeni (PSSH)</b></li> </ul>
Ministry of Education and Sciences	Education will merge with sports in a Ministry of Education and Sports. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Minister of Education and Sports: Lindita Nikolli (PSSH)</b></li> </ul>
Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities	The new Ministry will be called Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Minister of Social Welfare and Youth: Erion Veliaj (PSSH)</b></li> </ul>
Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection	The competences of this Ministry will be consolidated by taking back some, which were previously given to other ministries. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and Administration of Waters: Edmond Panariti (LSI)</b></li> </ul>
Ministry of Tourism, Cultural Affairs, Youth and Sports	The Ministry of Culture will be stripped of its competences over youth and sport, which will be transferred to the Labor and Education Ministries respectively. The same will happen with tourism. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Minister of Culture: Mirela Kumbaro-Furxhiu (PSSH)</b></li> </ul>
Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration	The Ministry of Environment will have exclusive competences for the protection of environment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Minister of the Environment: Lefter Koka (LSI)</b></li> </ul>
Ministry of Innovation and ICT	Albania will have a Minister – not a Ministry – for Innovation and Public Administration. The new government will have three ministers without portfolio. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Minister of Innovation and Administration: Milena Harito (PSSH)</b></li> <li>• <b>Minister of Local Affairs: Blend Çuçi (PSSH)</b></li> <li>• <b>Minister for Relations with Parliament: Ilirjan Celibashi (PSSH)</b></li> </ul>

- The new government has announced a campaign to demolish constructions built without legal permit in the Albanian Riviera. During his tenure as Tirana's mayor, Rama successfully demolished such constructions along Lana River banks. He now has the ambition to do the same at a much larger scale. The local government of Vlorë – a municipality controlled by the Socialists – has already started the demolition of illegal buildings in Orikum.
- The policy of "You are either with me or against me", previously adopted by Berisha, will be abandoned. The new leadership has promised to govern for all regardless of political belief in an effort to rebuild a spirit of cooperation among Albanians. This development may put an end to the problem of the public administration, which has been captured by political parties' partisans.
- The new government supports the full independence of the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) and intends to strengthen its capacity by twinning it with the relevant agency of an EU member state. Such a development will make impossible the government intervention in data, which is important for the adoption of necessary economic policies and reforms.

Furthermore, the new leadership has positioned itself as the only option for Albania's further modernization. They plan to develop close relations with the leftist politicians in Europe and with former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair in particular, who will be advising the PM on the acceleration of Albania's modernization process.

**Challenges ahead:** The main challenge of new PSSH-LSI coalition government will be the high expectations of Albanians after a massive vote in its favor. At the same time, the new government will find itself in a difficult economic and financial situation, which will make its job to keep the pre-election promises very difficult. Furthermore, the new government must coexist with institutions often seen as controlled by Berisha, such as the Presidency, the High Council of Justice, the Secret Service, or the General Prosecutor. However, inertia or resistance on their part may once more prove the state dysfunctional and might obstruct the path towards reform. The new prime minister will also face the challenge of maintaining the right balances within the governing coalition, especially among the officials of two coalition partners. Generally, the PSSH-LSI government's priorities are likely to reflect the tasks that led to Berisha's defeat:

- **Economic stagnation:** The new government must face the consequences of depression in Greece and Italy, which have cut capital and remittance inflows. In addition, revenues from taxation are dwindling as economic growth slows. Effective measures to boost the flagging economy are needed; the government may seek IMF advice to slash the budget deficit, to address the high rate of public debt and the non-performing loans, to make banks more resilient and to advance growth-enhancing reforms. The Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) is expected to give the economy a boost with the creation of new jobs.
- **Poverty and high unemployment:** The new government's program focuses on tackling unemployment, which accounts for 30 percent of the workforce. Rama pledged to create 300,000 new jobs and to improve the life conditions of ordinary Albanians, by removing taxes on basic products and extending state-provided health care to unemployed citizens. (for PSSH's pre-election promises see [Albanian Elections Observatory Brief No. 3](#))
- **High level corruption:** Despite anti-corruption measures and strong statements for many years, graft has not been stamped out. It remains widespread in the judiciary and the health system, among other areas. Corruption has penetrated the political system; no politician has ever been sent to jail under the charge of

corruption, though many have been caught red-handed. The new government seems determined to strengthen law and order in an attempt to rebuild public trust in the judiciary. However, the new government can quickly lose credibility, especially since its own member Ilir Meta was been involved in the corruption scandal that sparked off the 21 January 2011 anti-government protests in which four protesters died.

- **Institutional Malaise:** To translate the government's political promises into action requires an effective administration that works according to the rule of law. More than two decades after the end of communism, Albania still finds itself with few functioning independent institutions and a politicized public administration. Strengthening independent institutions and consolidating a professional public administration constitute a key challenge for the new government in effort to consolidate people's trust in public institutions. The general public remains suspicious of the authorities because they lack impartiality.
- **Investments:** Although the previous government took measures to reduce the cost of doing business, attracting foreign investments has been a challenge because of investors' skepticism. The government needs to address the remaining constraints that hinder investments such as the uncertain property rights, the weak enforcement of the rule of law, the inadequate physical infrastructure and the ineffective bureaucracy. Although the program of the new government is ambitious, there is no fiscal room for major public investments.

In line with the previous government's strategic objectives in foreign policy, the new government will also prioritize EU membership. Albanian politicians are promising to make 2013 a year of moving closer towards European institutions, and are optimistic about recent developments. Basic conditions that the Commission had imposed have been fulfilled: the adoption of "the three laws" (public administration, judiciary, and the regulation of parliamentary procedures) and uncontested elections. Without doubt this is a step in the right direction. However, major reforms have to be implemented in consensus with the opposition in order to renew momentum in country's bid for EU membership. EU officials have made it clear that Albania's April 2009 EU membership application will make no progress until there is clear evidence that the country's political institutions are functioning properly and deliver results in the fight against organized crime and corruption. A key question will be whether the EU will grant Albania candidate status in December. Granting candidate status will encourage reformist forces and could bring new momentum for genuine change. In contrast, delaying the granting of the candidate status may encourage conservative forces and reinforce the status quo against which Albanians voted massively on June 23<sup>rd</sup>.

## A stable government is crucial for Albania

It is crucial for Albania that a stable government is formed while Brussels weighs its response to the country's EU membership in December. Following pressure from the Socialist International for the unification of the Albanian left, the two left-wing parties re-established ties in April after a long period of fierce rivalry. Reconciliation between Rama and Meta has opened the way for a stable cooperation, unlike the 'marriage of convenience' between Meta and Berisha. The two parts are from the same side of the political fence and have no reason to upset their pre-electoral arrangement. Despite some bickering, the new coalition seems to have a solid foundation, which could lead to a stable government that will complete a full term in office. Given, however, the track record of Albanian politics it would be premature for anyone to bet on the longevity of the new government.

## Tirana's Mayor: the new opposition leader

After Berisha's resignation following PDSH's defeat, the party rushed to elect his successor. The choice was between Tirana's Mayor Lulzim Basha and former transport Minister Sokol Olldashi. Basha, who is perceived to be in Berisha's inner circle, won by a landslide against his rival, receiving 80 percent of the vote. However, the new chairman was elected with an extremely low voter turnout. From the 105,000 party registered members only 41,360 voted. In addition, there was a controversy over the voting rights of - mainly older - party members due to a dispute over the party's membership cards. This made Sokol Olldashi to dispute the outcome of the contest. Overall, the contestation of the process by Olldashi and the refusal of several senior PDSH figures to congratulate the new leader may be a sign of future divisions in PDSH between the old guard and the new generation, even if the party appears for now united.

PDSH has also failed to identify the real problems and the messages that the elections brought. The Democrats are continuing with their rivalry and the inflammatory rhetoric against PSSH leader Edi Rama with Basha saying that he will continue Berisha's policies and practice. It is believed that Basha had been hand-picked as Berisha's successor long before the elections, in order to allow Berisha to retain control behind the scenes. Such tactics go against the message of the elections, which was for genuine change both within and across parties. With three-fifths of parliamentary seats belonging to the government, Albania needs a strong but responsible opposition.

## Conclusion

The successful holding of the June 23<sup>rd</sup> elections and the smooth rotation of power mark an important step for Albania's international image. However, elections alone, even if they are in full accordance with international standards, are no salve for Albania's democracy. The picture of Albanian democracy and rule of law that emerged from the last four year's developments is still quite problematic, casting doubt on whether the political scene will decisively normalize. One of the factors that burdens Albania in its quest to consolidate a democratic society necessary for joining EU is the role of the political class. A stable and reform-oriented government and a constructive opposition would renew momentum in Albania's bid for EU membership, while the political and social stability will create conditions for attracting the foreign investment necessary to maintain growth. It is time for the Albanian political elite to establish a constructive political dialogue and to abandon the confrontational political culture, where individual interest often prevails over national ones. This is the desire of the Albanian people, as revealed in these last elections.



## Check related analysis:

-  Introduction to Albanian Politics and Elections – Albanian Elections Observatory Brief No. 1, available at: <http://www.eliamep.gr/?p=15623>
-  Controversy over the Central Election Commission and Political Coalitions for June Parliamentary Elections – Albanian Elections Observatory Brief No. 2, available at: <http://www.eliamep.gr/?p=16244>
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