

# What kind of majority will emerge after the Albanian general elections?

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Analysis

The Albanians are being convened to ballot on 23rd June next to renew the 140 members of the Assembly of the Republic, the only chamber in Parliament. The two main political parties, - the Democratic Party (PDSH) led by Prime Minister Sali Berisha and the Socialist Party (PSSH) led by Edi Rama – have very similar programmes and both support the country's integration into Europe. Polls show that electoral campaigns do not influence the Albanians very much since they mainly vote for a man rather than for a party.

## The Political Players involved

### *Prime Minister Sali Berisha's Democratic Party*

The Democratic Party has brought together an electoral coalition, the Alliance for Employment, Well-Being and Integration, which rallies 25 parties in view of the general election. Within this alliance feature the Republican Party (PRS) led by Fatmir Mediu, the Movement for National Development, the Agrarian Party led by Lefter Xhuvleri and the Justice, Integration and Unity Party (PDIU) led by Shpëtim Idrizi, who represents Albania's Cham community. "The coalition's aim is to progress along the path to European integration," declared the PDSH's secretary general, Ridvan Bode.

The head of government is highlighting the achievements made during his term in office: investments in education, healthcare and social policies, as well as the implementation of major infrastructure projects. He is pleased with the results that have followed in the wake of the introduction of the flat tax rate set at 10% on VAT, income and company tax. "We have collated 9.2 billion taxes that we have invested in infrastructure projects," declared Sali Berisha. According to the Prime Minister fiscal reform has enabled Albania to avoid recession and to maintain a growth rate of between 3%-4%.

The head of government has promised, if re-elected, that he will create 250,000 jobs and that he will continue the reforms, notably tax reform. "We have transformed Albania and on 23rd June we shall ask the Albanians to continue this development. Our pro-

gramme is ambitious and the reforms we are now proposing are based on economic and fiscal freedom and the support of growth and youth employment," indicated Sali Berisha. He has set the goal of attracting 6 billion \$ in foreign investments over the next four years. The Prime Minister invited the Albanians who have left the country to return, promising them tax dispensations for a three to five year period after their return home.

### *Edi Rama's Socialist Party*

The Socialist Party never acknowledged the Democratic Party's victory in the general elections of 28th June 2009, during which it claimed there had been fraud whilst Sali Berisha's party deemed that it was "the best election ever organised in Albania". After the 2009 elections the socialists boycotted Parliament for a year before taking up their seats after mediation by the European Parliament. Some months later in January 2011, the socialist opposition organised numerous demonstrations against Sali Berisha's government. These were severely repressed by the police: four people were killed and several others injured by gunshot on 21st January 2011 in front of the government building. The Prime Minister said that these demonstrations were "the start of a coup d'Etat" whilst the socialists accused the head of government of having transformed the peaceful demonstrations into a bloodbath. The protest movement started again some weeks later in May after the local elections. The Socialist Party challenged the victory of Luzim Basha (PDSH) who won the town

hall of Tirana ahead of the Socialist Party leader Edi Rama. After this local election the socialists resumed their boycott of parliament.

In April 2013 two high ranking executives of the Albanian Republican Guard who were suspected of murder during an opposition demonstration in January 2011 were acquitted by a court in Tirana. The Prosecutor had recommended sentences of 23 to 25 years respectively for the Commander of the Republican Guard, Andrea Predni and for another soldier, Agim Llipo, both accused of having fired their guns into the crowd and of having killed four demonstrators. The court also acquitted Armando Kasaj, who formerly worked closely with the Prime Minister accused of having tried to delete pictures recorded by the surveillance cameras during the demonstrations.

Finally the election on 11th June 2012 of Bujar Nishani (PDSH) as President of the Republic again illustrated the deep rifts in the Albanian political classes. The socialist MPs refused to take part in the election.

In view of the general election on 23rd June the Socialist Party has formed an electoral coalition, the Alliance for a European Albania with 37 other parties: the Socialist Movement for Integration led by Ilir Meta; the Union for Human Rights led by Vangjel Dule and the Social Democratic Party led by Skënder Gjinush. Edi Rama said that the restoration of democracy in Albania was the coalition's priority.

On 3rd May last the Assembly of the Republic opened a parliamentary inquiry into the opposition leader, Edi Rama, who is accused of having aggressed (both physically and verbally) Egin Ceka, Albania's Ambassador at the OSCE on 24th April last after the latter expressed his disagreement with what Mr Rama had said. This inquiry is the third of the kind that has been opened against Edi Rama.

#### *The Socialist Movement for Integration led by Ilir Meta*

On 4th April last the ministers of the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI) resigned from Sali Berisha's government. "The withdrawal of three ministers is not designed to destabilise the team in office but their pre-

sence in the government no longer makes any sense," declared its leader Ilir Meta. A Democratic Party partner since 2008, the LSI's leader therefore changed his mind and decided to join forces with the left in the elections on 23rd June. Created in 2004 after a split within the Socialist Party, the LSI first worked alongside the socialists which it helped win in several towns in the local elections of 18th February 2007, including Tirana where Edi Rama was re-elected for a third term in office. The following year Ilir Meta drew closer to Sali Berisha. Thanks to its alliance with the Democratic Party, the LSI, which is the third political party in Albania, managed to place three ministers and clinch 20% of the civil service posts available after the general election on 28th June 2009.

After keeping Edi Rama at a distance for the last four years Ilir Meta has however repaired his links with the socialist leader. "A *leftwing victory in the general elections will lead to a new political balance that is vital for Albania's integration into the European Union,*" he indicated.

The rapprochement of the LSI and the PSSH is not to the taste of everyone in the PSSH. Moreover it has been suggested that the agreement between the two parties stipulates that the departure of the LSI from Sali Berisha's government should be linked to a PSSH approval of three reforms (legal system, civil service, procedural rules in parliament) that are vital for Albania's official bid to enter the European Union. The socialist MPs refused to approve these reforms on 6th May last.

#### **The Return of Nationalism?**

The Red-Black Alliance (AK) was founded on 20th March 2012 by Kreshnik Spahiu. Its name comes from a football supporters' organisation and takes up the colours of the Albanian flag (a black eagle on a red background). The party is fighting for the unification of all Albanians in the Balkans, notably those in Kosovo and Macedonia, to whom they want to grant Albanian passports. One third of Albanians live abroad. The party is also fighting for the renewal of the political elites: it is asking for the limitation of electoral mandates and for a ban on anyone leading a political party for a long period of time.

"We are praying to God to guide us in our difficult fight against traitors and anti-Albanians," indicated Kreshnik Spahiu. He has accused Labour Minister Spiro Ksera (PDSH) of undertaking anti-national activities and of having connections with the Greek far right party Golden Dawn and of having used as an advisor, Theofan Kaliviotis, an Albanian born Greek who is said to be leading an irredentist movement for the independence of Northern Epirus, a region in the south of Albania that for a long time was fought over by Tirana and Athens. On 8th January last the Red-Black Alliance, which has chosen "God first and Albania above all else" as its motto in these general elections, asked for the organisation of a referendum on a union of Kosovo and Albania.

Tirana already has a party which represents the Cham community: the Justice, Integration and Unity Party (PDIU) which comprises two MPs. At present it is a member of Sali Berisha's electoral coalition. The Chams are Albanians from Northern Greece who have been accused by Athens of collaborating with the Nazis and who were expelled after the Second World War.

On the independence of Kosovo nationalism grew in Albania. According to the polls support to the Albanians of Kosovo is growing. A nationalist discourse echoes amongst the poor in Albania, who live in a country which is suffering both a moral and social crisis and where differences between the political parties are weak and where political leaders often place their own interests above those of the nation. The Albanian nationalists are not anti-European: like all of their fellow-countrymen they support the country's integration into the EU.

And so will the Red-Black Alliance be the next king-maker? It is too early to guess but everyone has seen that its appearance on the political stage has changed the discourse of the politicians who have dominated the latter over the last few years. Hence in November last Prime Minister Sali Berisha declared that a part of Greece, i.e. Epirus, the region shared between Greece and Albania was also Albanian.

This declaration led to the cancellation of the visit by the Greek Foreign Minister Dimitris Avramopoulos to Tirana during the ceremonies that had been organised to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Albania's independence. During this event the head of government again said that he wanted to see the emergence of Grand Albania "from Presevo to Preveza, from Podgorica to Skopje" and to remove all borders so that all Albanians could finally live as one nation only. A week later during a speech at the University of Pristina the Prime Minister declared that he was against the unification of Albania

and Kosovo, saying that both countries would lose a great deal from a modification to their borders.

Finally a short time afterwards Sali Berisha stressed that although Albanians live in five different states they could however not be considered as five different nations "Albanian unity is the alternative solution to this situation," he said.

At the end of April last more than 20 members of the Red-Black Alliance decided to leave to the party in protest against the way Kreshnik Spahiu was leading the party. "Kreshnik Spahiu is not acting in the interests of the nation but in his own interests," maintained Dashmir Uruci, the leader of economic affairs within his party. Ago Nezha, responsible for agriculture, stressed that the leader was "managing the Red-Black Alliance as if it were his own business." Dissidents notably accuse Spahiu of having drawn closer to Prime Minister Sali Berisha. Moreover opposition leader, Edi Rama maintained that Kreshnik Spahiu had asked him for five ministerial posts in the next government in exchange for his party joining the Alliance for a European Albania, the socialist coalition. The leader of the Red-Black Alliance denied these accusations and said that his party had only set two conditions – both were categorically rejected – to join the opposition coalition: the disappearance of the border between Albania and Kosovo and an agreement in view of imprisoning Sali Berisha in the future.

### European Integration, a consensual issue of division

"The government reforms have enabled Albanians to travel freely in Europe. We deserve the status of official candidate for EU membership," maintained Prime Minister Sali Berisha. He had promised – if re-elected – that his will make his country an official EU candidate country – a project which is being held up by the socialists in his opinion.

In October last Brussels asked Tirana to reform its legal system and its civil service and to finalise the procedural roles in Parliament before they might consider the country becoming an official candidate for entry into the European Union. These reforms absolutely have to be adopted by parliament by a 3/5th majority. To do this the government therefore needs the votes of the opposition, which until now, has refused to support it. Prime Minister Sali Berisha said he supported the organisation of a referendum to enable a solution to the situation. "The Albanians will show their massive support to the European integration of their country. The referendum is the best way to overcome the opposition's obstacles and to put an end to Edi Rama's plan to boycott the parliament after his defeat in the elections on

23<sup>rd</sup> June next," stressed the head of government. On 4<sup>th</sup> March next Stefan Füle, European Commissioner for Enlargement and for the European Neighbourhood Policy, did say that he was against the organisation of a popular consultation on this issue saying that a referendum was not the best means to come to the necessary consensus between the parties.

The two main political parties in Albania accuse each other for the failure of the negotiations. The EU has already refused to grant official candidate status to Albania on two occasions, after it first made a bid in April 2009. "That a country is rejected on two occasions by Brussels is an unprecedented event. Corruption, organised crime, poverty and poor governance explain this. It is the government's responsibility," declared the leader of the Social Democratic Party (PSS) and former Foreign Minister, Paskal Milo.

### The Albanian Political System

The Albanian Parliament is monocameral. Its only Chamber, the Assembly of the Republic, comprises 140 members, elected every four years in a proportional vote within 12 multi-member constituencies which correspond to Albania's 12 administrative regions. The number of constituency seats varies between 4 and 32 depending on the number of voters living in each of them. The seats are first attributed to the electoral coalitions within the regional constituencies according to the Hondt method, then within each coalition to the political parties that comprise it according to the

Sainte-Laguë method. Every party must win at least 3% of the votes cast (5% for a coalition of parties) to be represented in parliament.

On 25<sup>th</sup> April last Sali Berisha invited Edi Rama to speak of the vote by Albanians abroad. The head of government hopes to find rapid agreement with the opposition on this issue. "It is a question of honour and dignity to offer Albanians living abroad the chance and the conditions to vote as all civilised nations do for their citizens," declared the head of government.

Six political parties are represented in the Assembly of the Republic at present:

Three belong to the coalition "Alliance for Change":

- the Democratic Party (PDSH), founded in 1990 and led by outgoing Prime Minister Sali Berisha, has 68 seats;
- the Republican Party (PRS), led by Fatmir Mediu, has 1 MP ;
- the Justice, Integration and Unity Party (PDIU), which represents the Cham community and is led by Shpëtim Idrizi, has 1 seat;

Two are members of the Coalition for Change:

- the Socialist Party (PSSH), created in 1991 and led by Edi Rama, has 65 seats;
- the Party for the Unity of Human Rights (PBDNJ) led by Vangjel Dule, which represents the Greek minority has one seat;

The last belongs to the coalition "Socialist Alliance for Integration":

- the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI), founded in 2004 and led by Ilir Meta. A member of Sali Berisha's government until April last, it has four seats.

### Reminder of the general elections results of 28th June 2009 in Albania

Turnout: 50.77%

Political Parties	No. of votes won	% of votes won	No. of seats won
<b>Coalition Alliance for Change</b>	712 745	46,92	70
<b>Coalition Union for Change</b>	688 748	45,34	66
<b>Coalition Socialist Alliance for Integration (LSI)</b>	84 407	5,56	4
<b>Coalition Freedom Axis</b>	27 655	1,81	0
<b>Law and Justice Party (PLiDr)</b>	4 865	0,32	0
<b>Independents</b>	756	0,05	0

Source : Central Albanian Electoral Commission  
([http://www.cec.org.al/images/stories/zgjedhje-per-kuvend/2009/rez\\_vend.pdf](http://www.cec.org.al/images/stories/zgjedhje-per-kuvend/2009/rez_vend.pdf))

## General Elections under close supervision

"These elections will be a test for the smooth functioning of Albania's democratic institutions and for its progress on the path to the European Union," declared Catherine Ashton, the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Indeed the election will be monitored very closely by the Brussels authorities who fear that the lack of dialogue and cooperation between the political parties are preventing Tirana from organising democratic elections.

For his part the European Commissioner for Enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy, Stefan Füle, insisted on recalling that "the electoral campaign was a not a time to slow reform directed towards the European Union. The government and the opposition must assume their responsibilities to implement reform in the civil service, the legal system and the functioning of Parliament and in terms of the fight to counter corruption."

According to Stefan Füle, "the vital issue for the modern Albanian state is the following: what has to be done so that the next general elections are transparent and democratic?" even if the smooth running of the election does not settle the vital issues which Tirana faces, like for example, the inexistence of the culture of compromise in Albania.

The Socialist Party indicated that the electoral lists

contained many irregularities. In its opinion 25,874 people were registered several times and 352,237 are said to be registered without any precise address details.

Finally the Central Elections Committee (KQZ) no longer has a representative from the opposition since the withdrawal of two socialists who resigned from their office deeming that Parliament had infringed the organisation's independence after it had dismissed one of its members. In all the Central Elections Committee comprises 7 members, 4 of whom are put forward by the power in office.

According to a poll by the Italian institute Piepoli for the television channel Vision Plus TV the Alliance for a European Albania – a coalition led by the socialists is due to win the general election on 23<sup>rd</sup> June with 49% of the vote, of which 10% will go to the Socialist Party and 6% to the Socialist Movement for Integration. The Alliance for Employment, Well Being and Integration, outgoing Prime Minister Sali Berisha's coalition is due to win 40% of the vote, of which 35% will go to the Democratic Party. New Democratic Spirit, born of a split within the Democratic Party is due to win 5.5% of the vote, likewise the Red-Black Alliance.

According to a poll by the Italian institute IPR Marketing for the television channel TV Ora, half of the Albanians (49.50%) say they are not very interested in the electoral campaign.

# The opposition (Left) wins the general elections.

Confusion reigned in the evening of the general election on 23<sup>rd</sup> June in Albania, since both the right in office led by the Alliance for Employment, Well-Being and Integration, a coalition comprising the Democratic Party (PDSH) of outgoing Prime Minister Sali Berisha and 24 other parties, as well as the leftwing opposition led by the Alliance for a European Albania, a coalition of 38 parties (including the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI) of Ilir Meta) led by the Socialist Party (PSSH) and Edi Rama, were claiming victory. Finally on 26<sup>th</sup> June outgoing Prime Minister Berisha acknowledged his defeat.

Turnout totalled (53.52%) and was higher than that registered during the previous general election on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2009 (50.77%). However, no official result has been announced yet.[1]

Again many incidents were recorded during the election. Gjon Pjeter Gjoni, an LSI member was shot dead near the polling station in Laç, a town

that lies 40km to the north of Tirana. Three other people, including a Democratic Party candidate, were injured.

Results

## General elections in Albania 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2013

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The international community had warned the Albanian authorities however and had encouraged them to ensure that the general elections ran in a democratic manner. «Albanian leaders are jointly responsible for creating the conditions so that the election results could be accepted by all,» warned European Commissioner for Enlargement and the Neighbourhood Policy Stefan Füle. «These general elections will be a test for the smooth running of Albania's democratic institutions and its progress on the path to the European Union,» declared Catherine Ashton, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy «I am encouraging the political leaders to avoid any activity for short term political gain that might affect the development of Albania negatively either in the mid or long term» indicated Eugen Wollfarth, head of the OSCE's mission in Albania.

8,153 observers, including 564 foreigners, were responsible for monitoring the election. The OSCE observers' mission concluded that «the atmosphere of mistrust between the two main political parties affected the electoral environment». The murder in Laç «as well as other isolated violent incidents marred the beginning of the election.» «In comparison with the elections in 2009 and 2011 little progress has been made. But the elections were free,» noted one OSCE manager Roberto Battelli.

During the last general election on 28th June 2009 the Socialist Party refused to acknowledge the victory of the Democratic Party, whilst the PDSH leader Sali Berisha deemed that they had been «the best

elections ever organised in Albania». The socialists boycotted parliament for nearly a year before taking up their seats after mediation by the European Parliament.

The smooth running of the general elections was a condition set for Tirana's rapprochement with the European Union. Brussels has already twice refused to grant Albania official candidate status after it first applied in April 2009. Last October Brussels asked Tirana to reform its legal system and the civil service and also to complete parliamentary procedure rules before it could consider becoming an official candidate to join the EU. On 30th May the Assembly of the Republic of Albania, the only chamber in Parliament, adopted three bills (new parliamentary regulation, reform of the status of civil servants and the appointment of the judges in the Supreme Court).

The future Prime Minister will have a difficult time in implementing the numerous economic reforms which are vital to this country, the poorest in Europe. The governor of the Albanian central bank Ardian Fulani warned the authorities about the sharp rise in public spending, which over the first four months of the year had doubled in comparison with those recorded during the same period in 2012. The budgetary deficit of the first four months of 2013 totals 9.8% whilst revenues only increased by 0.3%. The unemployment rate officially lies at 14% in Albania but according to many analysts it in fact lies at around 40% of the working population. Finally according to the IMF corruption and the black economy is said to absorb 60% of the Albanian GDP.

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