

Request for Meeting with Member and Staff

What: 20 minute meeting for leader of Albanian opposition party to discuss upcoming elections in Albania with Member and Staff.
When: Thursday, April 27; Friday, April 28; Tuesday, May 2; or Wednesday, May 3.
Why: To brief on electoral integrity issues and request Member support of letter expressing concern that elections be held in free and fair manner.
Who: Fatmir Mediu, leader of the Republican Party of Albania (RPA), representing his party, and Lulzim Basha, leader of the Democratic Party of Albania (DPA).

Upcoming Elections and Concerns about Electoral Integrity

- Since February, thousands of Albanians have peacefully protested in the capital, Tirana, in support of Mr. Basha's call for a caretaker government to oversee the elections.
- The DPA and its supporters are concerned that money and influence from Soros-allied entities that support the incumbent Prime Minister and his Socialist party-led government will further compromise the integrity of the elections.
- Albania has long served as a base from which criminal entities smuggle illicit substances to the rest of Europe, notably cannabis and heroin. According to the DPA, the current government has brought drug lords and organized crime bosses into the Parliament and ministries to corrupt the election process.
- The DPA and the unified opposition coalition may boycott the June 18 elections, resulting in an election delay. Incumbent Rama's supporters are pressing for elections to be held regardless of election integrity concerns raised.

About DPA and RPA

The DPA is Albania's largest conservative party and leads the opposition. The DPA is led by Lulzim Basha, former mayor of Albania's capital city, Tirana. Basha served as Interior Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Minister of Public Works, Transport, and Telecommunications. The RPA and all conservative-leaning parties have joined DPA in a unified opposition coalition.

- The DPA and RPA both stand for free and fair elections, open markets, zero tolerance for corruption, view the United States as Albania's number one friend and strategic ally, and seek to establish stronger ties with the United States.
- The DPA, RPA and unified opposition seek to defeat the current Socialist Party-led government, run by Prime Minister Edi Rama. Elections are currently set for June 18.
- Under the leadership of the Socialist Party, the DPA and RPA say Albania's government and institutions have been degraded by corrupt officials and negative influence from far left entities allied with George Soros and his Open Society Foundations. Drug corruption has overwhelmed the honest conduct of business and government in certain areas.

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Albania's Electoral Integrity Compromised: Criminals in Office Remain Above the Law

Corruption, drug money, and criminal elements operating within the current Socialist Party-led government threaten to undermine more than 25 years of progress in Albania, an important NATO ally.

- Under the leadership of the current government, known organized crime figureheads brought in by incumbent Prime Minister Rama have not been removed from office.
- In 2015, A Law on Decriminalization was enacted to facilitate the removal of corrupt and organized crime-connected officials. This law has not been enforced.
- In one instance, a Member of Parliament (MP) was arrested on behalf of Belgian authorities on murder charges, after Albania's Ministry of Interior was publicly exposed for hiding his extradition request for several months.
- The Central Election Commission, controlled by the Socialist Party-led government has ignored requests for information on dozens of MPs and mayors with criminal records.
- According to the DPA and the unified opposition, the current government is protecting roughly a dozen MPs and mayors who should be removed from office.
- On February 27, one such MP, Armando Prenga, resigned under political pressure.
 - Upon Prenga's resignation, the U.S. Embassy said it "welcomes former parliamentarian Armando Prenga's departure from the parliament. Those with criminal records have no place in the parliament, courts, government, or municipalities of a NATO member country that aspires to join the EU." The Embassy also encouraged the Albanian people and Albanian institutions "to be vigilant in preventing criminals from becoming candidates in the June 18 elections. Albanians deserve to have a clean political and judicial system, free from the influence of organized crime and corruption."
- U.S. Ambassador to Albania Donald Lu warned that "corrupt politicians, judges, prosecutors, and crime bosses will try to steal the elections, the judicial reform, and everything else in the country."
- In addition to criminals being brought into government and protected, others serving jail sentences have been pardoned and released by corrupt judges taking orders from representatives of the Socialist-led government.
- In one instance, a pardoned gang leader and convicted murderer bragged about how the Socialist mayor of a town promised to secure him a job in the local government upon his release.

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Albania's Electoral Integrity Compromised: Electoral Reform Blocked and the Politicization of the Police

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- In May 2016, a set of electoral reforms proposed by the opposition were vetoed in the parliamentary commission on electoral reform.
- The proposed reforms included the introduction of electronic voting and counting to reduce instances of voter fraud.
- The lack of electoral reform in Albania caught the attention of EU officials. The European Council added the holding of free and fair elections to its list of priorities for opening EU accession talks with Albania.
- In November 2014, Socialist Party activists were filmed paying voters 20 Euros to vote for the majority candidate during a special election.
- In the 2015 local elections, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) election monitoring mission report found widespread vote buying, politicized electoral institutions, decreased trust among voters in the electoral process, and intimidation by the state.
 - In a June 22, 2015 statement about the local elections, the U.S. Embassy stated: "We echo the OSCE/ODIHR preliminary findings on the local elections and share their concerns about vote buying, allegations of pressure on voters, politicized electoral institutions, and other irregularities. We encourage the government and political parties to work to address these findings and other ODIHR recommendations."
- Police and civil servants are being employed as tools of the Socialist Party-led government to achieve their political objectives and manipulate the election process.
- The Minister of Environment stated in a TV interview that, "The State Police is serving the interests of a certain political party. We are today witnessing the police selectively targeting political opponents of that party."
- The OSCE's preliminary findings after the June 2015 elections concluded, among other things, that "the continued politicization of state institutions undermined the effective administration of the electoral process."

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Albania's Electoral Integrity Compromised: Drug Money Corrupts the Electoral Process

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- Albania has long served as a base from which criminal entities smuggle illicit substances to the rest of Europe, notably cannabis and heroin. According to the DPA, the current government has brought drug lords and organized crime bosses into the Parliament and ministries to corrupt the election process.
- Billions of Euros generated by drug trafficking are expected to be used to buy votes and otherwise manipulate the June 18 elections.
- In February, head of the OSCE mission in Albania, Bernd Brochardt, expressed concern about the risk associated with drug money in Albania: "This is a risk for the elections, because it can be used to buy deputies. All of this is a big risk and a bit dangerous. That is why we advocate changes in the Electoral Code, to avoid, or to much more limit and contain vote buying."
- According to the DPA, the current government protects drug traffickers. Among the most high profile cases is that of Klement Balili, called the "Escobar of the Balkans" for running an extensive heroin trafficking network.
- In the case of Balili, Albanian police refused to execute a warrant for his arrest issued by Greek authorities.
- Minister of Justice Ylli Manjani called for Klement Balili's arrest and stated that the police are connected to drug traffickers.

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