The necessary return of ideology: Political parties and ideological profile in Albania
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InTroduCTIon

The life of political parties in Albania is a relatively short one compared to other countries in the region. The country only recently celebrated its 100th anniversary of independence. In reality, the country has enjoyed democracy and independence for a far shorter amount of time. The declaration of independence in Vlora in 1912 was followed by internal conflict between different regional groups, foreign invasion, and a constant state of turmoil in which political activity was practically impossible. Even before the declaration of independence, the Albanian political class had shown a high level of inefficiency and unwillingness to come together in the common effort to push forward the issues of Albanian national identity and unity. The series of conflicts which followed the declaration of independence in 1912, including two world wars, resulted in a very hostile environment for political life to flourish in Albania. It took a long time for the country to take full control of its territory and national sovereignty, a must for the development of political parties and organizations. The long period of communist rule that followed from the end of the Second World War, established the tradition of a one party system. For almost 50 years, every political activity except for the ruling Communist Party was illegal, and thus the establishment of a proper multiparty system in the country had to be postponed till after 1991.

The official start of the multiparty system, and political organizations in Albania was 1991, when the country held its first general elections. Since then, the political environment
has been mostly bipolar in nature, with two main political parties contending power. The reformed Socialist Party and the Democratic Party have undoubtedly been the two main contenders in terms of political organizations in Albania for more than 20 years. In 1991, the Democratic Party represented the only available option for Albanians against the ruling Communist Party. At the time it was easy to make the distinction in terms of ideology between the right and the left spectrum. With the reformation of the old Labour Party to the Socialist Party, and the socio-political development of the country, it became hard, if not impossible, to separate political ideologies in Albania. General elections in 2013, were the first time in 23 years, where positions held by the DP and the SP on some crucial issues such as taxation, healthcare, education, and party ideology came back to play.

This paper will introduce the reader with a short background of political parties in Albania, while focusing on the period after 1991, with the emergence of the multiparty system in the country. The paper aims at providing readers with a profile of the political parties in Albania during the 2013 electoral campaign, the hot issues discussed during the campaign, as well as the position of the main parties on each of these issues. This paper also aims at emphasizing the role of ideology in Albanian politics at the moment, as well as analyzes the evolution of ideology into an important mechanism for Albanian political parties during electoral campaigns throughout the years.
The First World War had devastating consequences in Albania, both in terms of its economy, but also in terms of political activity in the country. Starting from 1914, different parts of the country’s territories came under foreign occupation. The divisions and internal conflicts between leaders of different regions inside the country were even more intensified by the influence of invading foreign forces. This animosity within the country, combined with extremely bad economic conditions and tribal division threatened the very existence of Albania as an independent nation.

These circumstances were certainly no proper ground for the development of a political class, and political organizations. Most of the political leaders, who had been part of the common effort to declare the country’s independence in 1912, had to leave the country, thus leaving Albania with no political class whatsoever. This constant situation of turmoil and instability which reigned in the country was the main reason why the evolution and development of political parties was postponed. Compared to other countries in the region, where political parties had been active for quite some time, such as Greece, Bulgaria, Croatia and Serbia, Albania only started its political life after 1920. 1920 would represent the beginnings of proper political life in Albania, mainly as the result of proper state institutions being built. At the same time, the mechanism, and opportunities aroused for the first multiparty elections to be held in the country.
The first organizations which resembled political parties in Albania came to the surface only after the end of the war, with many political leaders in exile organizing into political entities for the purpose of lobbying for the right of Albania to declare its independence. The “Political Party” of Albanians in the US, led by Sevasti Qiriazi Dako, is a clear example of this trend, as well as similar organizations in Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Italy, Belgium, etc. The most important political organization of the time was “Vatra”, founded in 1912, and which for the first eight years of its existence was led by a renowned Albanian political figure of the time such as Fan Noli.

On October 10th, 1920, several representatives of the National Council united under a political organization named “National Popular Party”, under which they declared an electoral program of 25 points for the reformation and modernization of the Albanian state and society. A bit more than a month later the rest of the political figures that were against the electoral program proposed by the National Popular Party, established a party of their own, under the name of Progressive Democratic Albanian party.

In terms of ideological differences in the beginning of the activity of political parties in Albania, differences were minor. What differentiated parties in their beginnings was a relative focus on national and conservative identity. Both parties agreed on the fact that the public administration, as well as the army, police forces and diplomacy, should be immune from political influence. The electoral platform of the Progressive Democratic Party also aimed at 1) setting a clear division between the legislative and executive powers, as well as the proper functioning of National Council, courts, and local governments.

This could be identified as the first attempt by political parties in Albania to define their identity in the Albanian political arena, as well as provide for a proper electoral platform to voters. However, both of these parties failed to eventually define themselves as political parties in the true meaning of the term.

Each of these two political parties defined themselves not as a result of a specific ideology, or position on specific issues, but mainly on individuals who held important positions in respective communities, regions and tribes. As such, the first two parties in Albania eventually came to be known by their leaders, rather than by what/who they represented. 2) The Popular Party came to be known first as Noli’s party, and then as Zogu’s, whereas the Progressive Party came to be known as the Vërlaci’s party and later the Kosovar party.

The characteristics and behaviour of political parties at the time, was not based on ideologies or political platforms. Because the feudal system still had a significant amount of influence over the Albanian people, parties became known by their leaders, which were often important people from the feudal cast. Therefore, politics as it is understood today wasn’t in order at the time in Albania. Most of the discussions and political conflict between political parties in the parliament came not as a result of a clash of ideologies, but rather because of personal animosities between party leaders, particularly related to territories of influence in the country.

During the Second World War, Italy invaded Albania, and in the attempt to legitimize the invasion in the eyes of the local population, it attempted to create a political organization including many of the Albanian leaders of different provinces in

the country. After the invasion, many of the previous political leaders, and members of the previous government and National Council, either fled the country, or were arrested and persecuted by the Italian forces. Under the Italian administration, there was practically no possibility for political life in Albania to develop. Representatives at the National Assembly were selected and appointed by the Italian administration. The Italian government authorized its representatives in Albania to establish an all inclusive Fascist Party of Albania, resembling the one in Rome.

The FPA party structures and organization was similar to the Fascist Party in Italy. The party’s Central Committee was an important part of the National Assembly, which gave it a considerable amount of authority over the Albanian people and the country’s territories. However, the party failed to appeal to the majority of the citizens, therefore resulted in nothing more than a forced attempted by invading Italian forces to give legitimacy to military intervention in the country, as well as to Rome’s expansionist plans. Immediately after the capitulation of Italy in the war, the FPA was dissolved. Once again, this was proof of the fact that the FPA was not, at any time during its existence, a political party which was founded on ideology, or that was representative of specific interest groups in the Albanian population.

These circumstances would eventually lead to resistance groups who operated in the underground, in order to express their opposition to the practices of the fascist administration in the country. These organizations would later on transform into a political organization which would play a crucial role in the overall anti fascist movement in Albania. At the end of the war, political life in Albania would be mostly characterized by conflicts and disagreements between these organizations.
At the end of the Second World War, two new political organizations emerged in the Albanian political arena. The first one, the Communist Party was created under the influence of the Soviet Union, with special assistance and coordination from the Yugoslav Communist Party. The Communist Party in Albania was established in 1941 in the capital of the country. The first Communist Party was the result of the unification of several underground organizations which were at the time part of the anti-fascist movement in Albania. With the assistance of the Soviet Union, and the help and supervision of the Yugoslav party, the three communist groups of the time came together under the umbrella of a unified Albanian Communist Party.

For most of its beginnings, the Communist Party did not function as a proper political organization. It merely served as a propaganda mechanism for the anti-fascist partisan divisions in the country. During its early years, the atmosphere within the party was characterized by internal conflict between different groups looking to take control of the party. The Communist Party in Albania was modelled based on the Yugoslav Communist Party. The influence some of the members of the YCP had on the highest members of the Communist Party in Albania was further proof of that. The practices and standards followed by the Communists in Albania also resembled those in the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia. The elimination of opponents within the party, centralization of decision making and control within

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a closed group of people, and lack of internal democracy, as well as persecution of political opponents to the party leaders, were among the features that defined the Communist Party during this time.

However, the Communist Party attracted a large number of supporters in Albania, especially among the young people. The reasons behind this large scale support were several, starting from the people support for the anti fascist movement, discontent with the situation under the fascist regime and poverty.

Parts of the Albanian society at the time however, did not agree with the Communist Party and its strategies for opposing the invading forces. These groups believed that the fight against fascism in Albania would only be successful if people came together for the national interest, and not by organizing in different political parties. That is the main reason why the founders of the National Front in Albania, established the front as a political organization, rather than a political party. The founders claimed their purpose was to transform the National Front into an all inclusive organization to fight against invading forces.

The National Front supported an aggressive fight against the Italian forces, the inclusion of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and Çamëria into a single Albanian state, agricultural reform, as well as different measures to modernize the country. The National Front declared itself as a strong supporter of western democracies, and opposed Communist propaganda from the Communist Party.

The third party established during the Second World War in Albania was the Legality Party, under the support of exiled monarch Ahmet Zogu. The Legality Party supported the idea of the establishment of a monarchic system in Albania. It devoted itself to fighting against the Communist Party and against those who were deemed as collaborators with the invading forces. The Legality Party also supported the idea of an ethnic Albania, and throughout its existence, often accused the Communist Party and the National Front of abandoning Kosovo and ethnic Albanians elsewhere, and therefore condemning them as traitors to the cause of an ethnic Albania.
The last years of the Second World War in Albania were characterized by an intensive fight for control between the three political parties. The political parties present on the ground during this time, resembled more to military organizations than anything else. The inability to discuss political views in the parliament because of foreign occupation, led them to often settle disagreements on the ground, by the use of force. Eventually, the political organization which was more successful on the ground as a result of numbers and support, gained control of the government after the end of the war. The Communist Party entered the capital of Tirana on October 16th, 1944 as winners, and future governing authorities of the country. Support for the Communist Party had increased considerably towards the end of the war, due to their promises an ideal society founded on freedom, equality, prosperity.

A national conference organized in 1942, recognized the Albanian Communist Party as the only legitimate authority in the country. The conference laid the foundation for the future establishment of a one party system in Albania, under the rule of the Communist Party. The establishment of the one party system would be a defining moment in the history of political life in Albania. The rigid rule of the Communist Party would eliminate all opposition voices, be it individuals who wished

to express their discontent towards the methods used by the communist regime, as well as political organizations of any kind. Political parties were declared illegal, and every sort of political dissent was dealt with violently.

During its 50 year old rule, the Communist Party in Albania managed to take control of all aspects of life in Albania, by means of communist propaganda, calling for the dictatorship of the proletariat. The party aimed at creating a new society, based on communist values in line with practices in the Soviet Union. The Communist Party relied on support and devotion from the masses, in particular from the working people, which represented the basis for communist power. Considering the fact that in 1944, the Albanian 80% of the Albanian population lived in the countryside; the Communist Party could rely on massive basis support in its beginnings.

The party established a violent regime based on persecution of political opposition, private property, and religion. The Party aimed at identifying itself with the masses, as opposed to the elite intellectuals and the wealthy. The fight against intellectuals, and the political elite existing until that time, was another aspect of communist ideology. The large number of intellectuals, wealthy property owners, and political elite which was persecuted, arrested or even physically eliminated was replaced by farmers, workers, and the low class. This could surely be regarded as one of the main reasons behind the failure of the communist agenda in Albania.

Communist ideology was based on the absolute role of the proletariat, and the dismissal of bourgeoisie, private property,

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religion and political opposition. The party declared its willingness and devotion to creating a \(^8\) “state of the workers and farmers”. It believed the state should be in charge of all aspects of economy in the country, and therefore the government undertook a large scale process of nationalization across the country. A large scale process of collectivization and agric was amongst the first major reforms introduced by the Communist Party in power. In line with communist ideology, land was taken from wealthy property owners, and redistributed to peasants and farmers. Ideology came to acquire excessive importance in the life of the people. Every aspect of life was determined and instructed by ideological needs and requirements. Marriage, employment, social relations, education were part of an overall mechanism designed by the party, to exert absolute government authority in the lives of each and everyone. The creation of the “new socialist man” was aided by the firm belief from the party that the individual is not important in a socialist society, but merely part of a large scale mechanism which would eventually guarantee equality and prosperity for the state. The education system was developed based on the soviet examples, with classes teaching Marxist ideology and propaganda. From the early years of his life, the individual had to go through the different stages through which the new socialist man was created. From the pioneer groups for the younger ones, all the way up to the very top as a member of the communist party, the individual was nurtured by communist ideals, aiming at making him devoted to the socialist cause.

Both foreign and internal influences on individuals other than party directives were considered as dangerous and unacceptable. This led to the nation wide ban on religion and

the possibility for people to practice it. Representative of religious sects were persecuted, exiled, publicly disgraced, and eliminated. Churches and mosques were brought down, and the party propaganda made sure to depict religion as one of the most dangerous enemy of the communist society.

The established system further postponed the democratic process of development of political organizations in Albania. Even by the time the Communist Party took power, political parties in Albania had failed to develop into proper political organizations, with a clear ideology and political platform appealing to different parts of the population. For more than 45 years, the political life in Albania was nonexistent, which had a significant impact on the pace of democratic development in the country after the fall of the communist government in 1991. The lack of experience in terms of democratic standards, led to a long transition for the country.
The beginning of the 1990 would bring about the introduction of a multiparty system in Albania. Although the Communist Party in power was highly reluctant to accept the possibility of other political parties being created in Albania, circumstances led to an eventual acceptance of their existence by the party in power. Increasing popular discontent towards the regime, rapidly deteriorating economic conditions, as well as regional developments (in terms of communist regimes being topped in Bulgaria, Romania, etc.) were among the top reasons why the Communist Party to cede in this regard. On 9th December 11th, 1990 the Albanian People’s Party organized approved the creation and existence of other political parties in Albania.

Many of the shortcomings of political life in Albania after 1991 would have to be attributed to the lack of political culture and experience during the country’s history. The country had practically no experience of a multiparty system or democracy. Invaded for most of the Second World War, and later less than 50 years of complete isolation, and dictatorship, the country was rather handicapped. The switch from a one party system to a multiparty one was a radical change for Albania’s political class. The preconditions for the existence and functioning of a proper multiparty system needed to be set up, which eventually required a lot more time than expected, despite the fact that

the first multiparty elections were held immediately after the communist regime was brought down after 1990.

The creation of the Democratic Party, as the first party created in Albania, was mostly based on an opposition of everything the communist regime stood for at the time. Among the first supporters of the Democratic Party you would be able to find representatives of almost all parts of the society, from intellectuals, to workers, students, liberal former communists, monarchist etc. The only thing DP supporters shared at the time, was not necessarily their views on democracy or the relation between state and the individual. The common denominator uniting everyone in a single front was their rejection of the communist regime. The Democratic Party therefore, needed not to rely on strong ideological framework, rather than support stemming from popular discontent towards the communist government.

The electoral platform of the DP, officially a party of the right spectrum, offered democracy, a capitalist market economy, the reestablishment of private property, human rights, recovery of the vital economic sector, and political pardon to political prisoners of the communist regimes and the right to education for every citizen. More than a clear ideological stance, the DP founded its political strategy on the popular movement willing to change the regime, almost at any costs. The former communist party also reformed, and changed its name to the Socialist Party. These two parties still dominate the political arena in Albania nowadays.
In terms of ideology, it was expected that the fall of the regime would lead to the creation and organization of political parties which would be representative of the different segments of the aspired democratic society. Surprisingly, this expectation has still not been met. Although the representatives of the left and right political spectrum in Albania have so far ruled political life in Albania, it is very hard to separate them in terms of ideology. Because of a lack of previous political culture, political organizations in Albania have not been able to constitute a set of values which traditionally represents the ideological framework on which modern political parties based their activity. To most of the political parties in Albania (DP and SP in particular) throughout the last 20 years, ideology has not been used as the guidelines by which electoral or government strategies are build upon. It is hard to tell political parties apart in Albania when it comes to their positions on important issues such as European integration, free market, social and public services, privatization, education or security. Kajsiu defines Albania today as a “democracy where political pluralism has lost its meaning due to ideological monism”. Both sides share more or less the same values and opinions on each of the above mentioned issues. Whatever identifiable difference is every done, is simply an instrument which is used to tell a party, apart from its opponent in an electoral campaign. Once in

power, there is hardly any difference in dealing with the issues in terms of party ideology and/or beliefs. This has led to what Kajsiu defines as the, 11) “instrumentalization of ideology and its reduction to a tool that serves to power”, where political parties in Albania only see ideology in terms of the positive or negative effect it might have on one side prevailing over the other in an electoral race. When it comes to smaller parties, which are usually fractions of the larger political divisions in Albania, almost all of them could be identified as leader parties. They have no specific ideological framework, often no electoral platform during campaigns, and they eventually become part of the larger left or right coalitions for Election Day. The most concrete example is the Socialist Movement for Integration, which Rakipi defines as a party which is not based 12) “on any principals, ideology and doesn’t represent any group/political segment or social strata”, but that despite all, has not only managed to survive the electoral system, but in the General elections in 2013, more than doubled its seats in the parliament.

Ideology has never been an important part in the electoral platform of any of the two biggest actors in Albanian politics. The Albanian public opinion finds it hard to differentiate between the DP and the SP in terms of their positions on some of the crucial issues. 13) Political debate between sides is rarely based on ideology, but rather on individual accusations mostly towards party leaders. Another specific of political parties in Albania is that political parties are identified by their leaders, as opposed to what they stand for in terms of values and beliefs. Almost all Albanian political parties are structured by what Cavo


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calls \(^{14}\) “a power pyramid, at the top of which stands the leader” According to many scholars, this is a result of the absence of internal democracy within political parties, which consequently leads to the abolition of a system of meritocracy for the party ranks. It is also a result of the excessive centralization process, typical of Albanian political parties, where the leader has almost absolute control over party decisions, and agenda. This has led to parties of the left spectrum, joining coalitions with parties from the right one, throughout the years. As Krasniqi puts it \(^{15}\) “The loss of political identity and relying on daily politics, have significantly decreased differences in electoral platforms between the main political parties”. From 1992 to 2012, it was hard for the Albanian electorate to differentiate between electoral platforms during electoral campaigns. In this regard, the general elections in 2013 were a surprising development, being that for the first time since 1991, the left, and the right spectrum of Albanian politics, made their positions clear for the electorate on important issues such as economy, healthcare, education, etc. General elections in 2013 therefore, provided for the first example of modern political behaviour from political parties in Albania.

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The June 23rd general elections in Albania were significant for a majority of reasons. Firstly, we see the emergence of two new political forces which were seen as potential intruders in the hegemony created by the SP and the DP in Albanian politics throughout the years. It was also the first time, where the two major political parties introduced an ideological debate on some important issues, while stating their positions on education, taxation, and healthcare. For the first time, the Albanian electorate could see glimpses of ideological differences in the two parties platform, based on a set of values by which each political spectrum aims to identify itself by.

A new fraction of the DP emerged under the New Democratic Spirit, led by the former President of the Republic Bamir Topi. While the Democratic Party under Sali Berisha ran to secure its third consecutive term in power, the Socialist Party under Edi Rama introduced the electorate with their Renaissance platform. The emergence of both the New Democratic Spirit, and the Red and Black Alliance, threatened to upset the electoral hegemony of the SP and the DP.

For the first time in Albania’s pluralist history, a populist movement turned political party such as the Red and Black Alliance ran for seats in the parliament. The RBA’s leader Kreshnik Spahiu, former deputy chair of the High Council of Justice, started up as a civil movement. It later slowly acquired the features of an actual political party. The party relied on anti government feelings and social discontent for the political
establishment in Albania. At the national level, the party expressed discontent on the level of corruption in Albanian politics, blaming both the DP and the SP for the long democratic transition of the country. It denounced the performance of the judicial system in Albania, the lack of rotation of the leaders in the main political parties, the centralization of power in a single group of people within the democratic government and the big social and economic gap in Albanian society. The party had all the attributes of a populist movement, since it called for a stronger emphasis on national identity, and heavily relied on national symbols and patriotic rhetoric throughout the campaign. In terms of foreign policy, the Red and Black Alliance focused on the idea of unification between Kosovo and Albania. It introduced the idea of a referendum in Albania on the issue. The RBA systematically criticized the government relations with Greece and Serbia. In terms of ideology, it is difficult to define the RBA, because as Rakipi puts it “the left and right wing in Albania have nothing to do with ideology and platforms, which are viewed as a legacy of the past”. After lengthy negotiations, mainly with the New Democratic Spirit and the SP, the Red and Black Alliance decided to run alone in the elections. The RBA did not secure any seats in the parliament which resulted from the June 23rd General elections.

The second newly emerging party in the political arena during the 2013 general elections campaign was the New Democratic Spirit. The party was the latest fraction to come out from the Democratic Party. The New Democratic Spirit was a result of growing discontent inside the ruling Democratic Party. Proof of this is the fact that that the leader of the NDS was the former President of the Republic, Bamir Topi, at the same time a very

prominent member of the DP. The New Democratic Spirit positioned itself to the center right spectrum of the political spectrum. During the campaign the party promised to safeguard the rights of property owners, guarantee payments for the persecuted from the communist regime. The party based its campaign on popular discontent for the government. It called for the necessity of a new way of doing politics in the country, based on evading political conflict leading to stagnation, and on party leadership rotation. It also promised, support for the European integration process of the country and good neighborly relations with countries in the region.

Despite the new entrances, the most interesting and appealing political competition was between the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party. As the two traditional ends of the bipolar political environment throughout the last 20 years, the political debate between the two was the main feature of the 2013 campaign. The novelty in this campaign was that for the first ever, the Albanian electorate was offered a set of options in the form of political platforms, shaped under ideological terms. Almost like never before, the two political parties publicly debated their positions on taxation, education, privatization, and healthcare. Considering the fact that debates on platforms had been so far replaced by accusations and smear campaigns during campaign period.

In the 2013 electoral campaign, the Socialist Party aimed gaining the majority of seats in the parliament. After the Socialist Party formed a coalition with the Socialist Movement for Integration, and other parties of the left spectrum, it started to introduce its electoral platform to the voters. Compared to the last general elections in 2009, this time the Socialist Party clearly positioned itself on the left of the political spectrum. It claimed that the Renaissance program it was introducing to the
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citizens was framed along the lines of the traditional left, with a particular focus on middle and lower classes, as opposed to the wealthy few, in terms of property legalization, lower taxes, free health care, cheaper and better quality public services, etc. In its platform, the Socialist Party strongly rejected the flat tax which had been implemented from the democratic government up to that point. The SP claimed that the flat tax was an unfair tax, where people who earned less, still had to pay the same taxes as people who earned much more. This, according to the SP led to deepening social inequalities, and less purchasing power for the majority of the population. As an alternative option the SP introduced the idea of progressive taxation. This method of taxation, according to the socialist, would guarantee a fair taxation mechanism, which would, according to their program, lower income taxes for 95% of the population. The Socialist called it the “fair tax”, and argued that at current financial circumstances, it would represent the best alternative for Albania.

Likewise, the DP strongly defended its position on the flat tax, arguing it guaranteed equal treatment between taxpayers, where everyone pays the same 10% taxes on their income. They argued that the Socialist proposition, aimed at hurting the interests of large companies, which would arguably introduce job cuts in order to make up for their eventual losses. That, according to the DP, would lead to hundreds of jobs being cut in important sectors of the Albanian economy.

Another hot topic during the 2013 general election campaign was healthcare reform. In line with the left wing ideals, the Socialist Party introduced the idea of free universal health care for all. The Socialists argued that the health sector as it is today is in need of deep reforms, starting from the amount of budget allocated to the sector from the government, to the way the
healthcare system was financed. The SP proposed free universal health care, which would be achieved by the establishment of a national health institute, which would buy the service from the government, as opposed to patients paying for healthcare by means of individual contributions. The Socialists argued that the current system, a combination of state subsidies and individual contributions, was not sufficient to provide the sector with the necessary funds. They also emphasized the fact a system based on individual contributions was unfair to those who could not afford it, which they considered to be the majority of the population.

The Democratic Party on the other hand, remained a supporter of the combined method of financing for the healthcare sector. They argued that there could be no proper financing of the sector, without individual contributions. The cost of a universal healthcare, which is paid for by the government, they argued, was unbearable for a small, modest country like Albania.

Education was also a topic of debate between the two main political forces. The Democratic Party continued to support the process of liberalization of high education in the country, which has in the last eight years more than doubled the number of students. The Democratic Party has in the late years relied on a combination between the private and public sector when it comes to high education. The very large number of private education institutions which have been granted a license, has contributed to the large liberalization of high education, making it easier to get a university degree for almost anyone. The Socialist Party opposes the current scheme in relation to high education, proposing several supervising mechanisms for both the public and private sector, in order to guarantee quality and standards provided by institutions in the field. The Socialist Party proposed a tough reform on the mechanisms used to
evaluate the criteria upon which candidates apply and are accepted to public universities. Therefore the Socialists argued for a system of meritocracy to be established, which would make it easier to differentiate between those who perform well throughout each of the academic stages, thus granting them priority in accessing high education. Furthermore, the Socialist Party proposed tougher control and supervision on private institutions, in order to guarantee the standards and quality required for them to be licensed by the government. Another proposition from the SP was related to the financing scheme for high education institutions (both private and public) by the government. The purpose of reforming the financing scheme for such institutions is to differentiate quality institutions from unreliable ones, in order to assist prospective students in their choice of study.

Once again, despite the fact that the issue of education is taken up for debate between the two most important political parties, is certainly a great sign. However, it is important to note how ideologically speaking; the position held by the SP would be traditionally attributed to the right spectrum, aiming at putting a stop to the massive liberalization of higher education. In the same line of thought, the social approach which has been adopted by the Democratic Party on this issue would be more befitting to a party on the left spectrum. This once again shows the lack of a proper ideological framework upon which political parties in Albania are able to design a successful and appealing political platform. It would be interesting to see the future developments in terms of the evolution of political culture in Albania. It would certainly befitting a democratic society if their representatives at the political level could actually debate on issues and positions based on ideology and community needs, rather than strict political interests.
The general elections in 2013 are certainly a good first step towards the realization of the importance of ideology and political platforms from political parties. Political platforms which contain various options and solutions to the needs and necessities of the community should be made available during each electoral campaign.
Out of all the categories of Albanian voters, young people and first time voters are those who mostly lack knowledge about different ideologies and the role that ideology plays in the rhetoric and decision making within a party or in the work of an elected administration.

In a national poll conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Albania, Albanian youngsters reflect the same polarization that exists in larger scale in the society identifying themselves in almost equal shares to the left and to the right.

Youngsters were given a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 means “extremely left” and 10 “extremely right” and asked to position their political orientation per scale. Their political views result in 27.1% Left; 25.5% Center; 27.9% Right; and 19.5% did not answer or could not assign themselves a position. There was little variation in youth political beliefs of male and female although females have the tendency to hide their political orientation (23.0%) compared to males (16.4%) Analysis of political orientation shows that the youth in Tirana tend to be positioned on the left side (31.1%) compared to the other urban (25.7%). 31.3% of the youngsters of rural areas affiliate their political orientation to the right side. The youngsters located in other urban places other than Tirana tend to be positioned in the center (29.2%) compared to 22.5% in the rural and 24.2% in Tirana. (See graphs in Annex 2)

Young people make an effort to differentiate themselves from their parents when it comes to most things, in the political orientation sphere the influence of family in Albania is quite large. This is mostly related to the fact that the parents might have jobs in public administration which in turn solidifies even more the ideological preference of their children. In this case the ideological orientation is manifested as a protection of interests rather than true political beliefs and values. Even so, the national FES poll presents a colorful picture since upon being asked whether their political believes matched their parents, most of the respondents 32.3% declared to share ‘somewhat’ the same political views with their elders. 29.1% of the young people converged their political views with their parents on a very much extend. 27 shared little and 14.5 claimed to be on the opposite side. (See graphs in Annex 2)

In the bigger picture it seems that youth feels a moderate satisfaction with the way democracy has been progressing in Albania while in the same time feel largely unrepresented by their peers already involved in the political sphere.

30.8% of the young respondents mentioned to be not at all represented by the youngsters in decision making positions. 33% of them perceived representativeness of the youth as little, leaving behind 27.2% who felt somewhat represented. 48.2% of the youth representatives assessed to be “quite satisfied “ with the current development of democracy in the country. 42.8% were satisfied with the democracy progression in the nation. The unsatisfied group of the sample amounts 27.8%. (See graphs in Annex 2)

17. Ibid.
Overall the results indicate the need for more education to young people about politics, participation and the connection of various ideological theories to contemporary parties in Albania. This kind of education for the moment available only ad hoc to participants in party youth forums trainings should be extended for the benefit of all first time voters and generally young voters so that their decision in the ballot box becomes more informed and hence more democratic.
### ANNEX 1:

**TABLE 1. GENERAL ELECTION JUNE 2009 RESULTS:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political party</th>
<th>Number of Votes</th>
<th>&gt; 0.1 % of National Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partia Aleanca e Maqedonasve për Integrim</td>
<td>1043</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia Toleranca e Re</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia per mbrojtjen e Emigrantëve</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia e Gjelbër</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia Rruga e Lirisë</td>
<td>1002</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia Konservatore</td>
<td>1067</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia e Reformave Demokratike</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia Bashkimi Demokrat</td>
<td>1030</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia Forca Albania</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia e të Drejtave të Mohuara</td>
<td>1408</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia Aleanca për Demokraci dhe Solidaritet</td>
<td>1067</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia Ora e Shqipërisë</td>
<td>786</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* > 0.2 % National Vote

Partia Demokracia e Re Evropiane                       | 2111            | 0.14                     |

Lëvizja për të Drejt. e Liritë e Njeriut                | 2931            | 0.19                     |

*(Official figures available at www.cec.org.al)*
TABLE 2: LOCAL ELECTIONS MAY 2011 RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political party</th>
<th>Number of Votes</th>
<th>&gt; 0.1 % of National Vote</th>
<th>&gt; 0.2 % National Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partia Bashkimi Popullor i Pensionistëve Shqiptar</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partia Demokrate për Integrim e Prosperitet</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>~ 0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partia e Pajtimit Kombëtar</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Partia për Mbrojtjen e të Drejtave të Emigrantëve</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partia për Mbrojtjen e të Drejtave të Punëtorëve të Shqipërisë</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia Rruga e Lirisë</td>
<td>1355</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia Toleranca e Re e Shqipërisë</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partia Personat me Aftësi të Kufizuara</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>0.06</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lëvizja për Drejtësi e Shqiptarëve</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia e Çështjeve Shqiptare</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>0.02</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia Kristian Demokrate e Shqipërisë</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partia Mendimi i Djathtë Liberal</td>
<td>1179</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partia Lëvizja Punëtore Shqiptare</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partia Ardhmëria Shqiptare</td>
<td>2503</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia Demokratike e Bashkimit Mysliman të Shqipërisë</td>
<td>1726</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia Reformatore Demokratike</td>
<td>1653</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia Aleanca e Maqedonasve për Integrim Europian</td>
<td>2512</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia Aleanca për Demokraci dhe Solidaritet*</td>
<td>3062</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partia Konservatore</td>
<td>2839</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Të dhënat zyrtare gjenden në: www.cec.org.al)
ANNEX 2: YOUTH AND IDEOLOGY

Convergence with parents’ political opinion

Source: “Voice of Albanian Youth” Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Tirana: 2012 (Graphs compiled by Institute for Development research and Alternatives -IDRA)

Political orientation
By urbanity

Source: “Voice of Albanian Youth” Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Tirana: 2012 (Graphs compiled by Institute for Development research and Alternatives -IDRA)
The necessary return of ideology:

Perceived representativeness of the youth

- Very: 27.2%
- Somewhat: 33.0%
- Little: 30.8%
- Not at All: 5.3%
- DK/NR: 3.8%

Source: “Voice of Albanian Youth” Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Tirana: 2012 (Graphs compiled by Institute for Development research and Alternatives -IDRA)