

Democratic Party of Albania selects a staunch communist as leader

December 18, 2009 3:29 PM • [Albania Headlines Examiner](#) • Pjerin Lumaj

Democratic Party of Albania missed the chance, if it ever had one, to become truly democratic, when it selection Sali Berisha, the current Prime Minister, as its chairman. Berisha, who after being admitted to membership in the Albanian Communist Party in 1971, rose quickly through the party ranks and became a “trusted” agent of the communist party, who would later serve as the personal medical doctor of the ill-famed dictator Ramiz Alia, whom he replaced in 1991.

“The selection of Sali Berisha, as the leader of the Democratic Party, is a step backwards in the country's transition from communism to political democracy,” said a delegate, who asked to remain anonymous because he fears retribution. “No one voted,” he said, “We just walked in and out as a formality. Berisha was selected, not elected. And it is shame because we had an opportunity to change the image of our party by electing a leader instead of selecting one. This makes Berisha the only communist in Eastern Europe to be both the PM and Party Chairman” he continued.

No primary elections were held within the Democratic Party and Berisha was the only candidate. In a carefully staged Party Congress held in Tirana in December 2009, Berisha received 1,208 votes out of the total of 1,213 delegates, which translates to 99.6% of the vote Only five votes were casted against him. (AP, December 12, 2009, www.etaiwannews.com)

Now he can claim that not neither [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#) of Iran, nor Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, nor his predecessors, Enver Hoxha and Ramiz Alia, ever received such a high percentage of votes in an intra-party “election” , commented Zeri i Poppullit, an opposition newspaper.

A controversial figure, Berisha was at a time fêted as the country's first non-communist president, as a reformer who would liberalized the economy and reform Albania's institutions. But soon, he was accused of authoritarianism, of electoral irregularities, and of instigating violence in an attempt to maintain his party's grip on power. www.esiweb.org

In 1997, Berisha was involved in a series of scandals which led to his electoral defeat. In 1998, Berisha was accused of attempting a coup, following the assassination of the DP politician Azem Hadjari and resultant protests by his supporters. The Socialist controlled parliament voted to lift his immunity in preparation for his arrest and prosecution. Attempting to restore calm to a country in turmoil, the international community advised against Berisha's arrest. www.esiweb.org

In 2005, Berisha expelled from the Democratic Party of Albania the MPs whom he disagreed with, purging the party of any opposition. And since his re-election in 2005, he has been accused of being involved in illegal arms dealings, corruption, usurping the freedom of the press, controlling the judiciary and threatening to fire the Attorney General who was investigating allegations against him and his Ministers concerning the Gerdece Arm Depot explosions and the mysterious death of the key witness to the alleged arms dealings, Kosta Trebecka.

Further, in 2008, Berisha passed a new Election Code, [prompting Claude Moniquet, President of the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center \(ESISC\)](#), www.esisc.com, to note that “ The adoption of new election code [in Albania] compromises possibilities for free election by excluding small political parties from the process... and assuring themselves control.... over Albania.“

During the 2009 electoral campaign, Berisha was accused of using his secret police, known as Shish, to arrest, intimidate, and even kill his opponents, giving the election campaign, in the words of International Institute for Middle-East and Balkan Studies (IFIMES) “the taste of blood” www.worldsecuritynetwork.com. Only days before the election of June 28, Aleksander Keka, Chairman of the Christian Democratic Party of Malesi e Madhe, and Fatmir Xhindi, a socialist MP, were assassinated. Their killers have yet to be identified or arrested, causing Berisha's opponents to accuse him of having something to do with these political murders. Both Keka and Xhindi were in Berisha's opposition.