

The Conservative Discovery of Albania: Drawing on a Heritage of Strong Social Codes to Modernize the Center- Right

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Abstract

Almost five decades of the harshest communist regime in Europe isolated Albania, transforming it into a European North Korea. Therefore, the European identity of Albanians and many aspects of its society, viewpoints and similarities with other nations of the Old Continent were lost to Europeans. This paper examines how Albania's historical social codes laid the groundwork for modern conservatism, the ideological and political struggles that defined its post-communist development, and the ongoing efforts to institutionalize conservatism in the country's center-right movement.

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I. Introduction: The Conservative Awakening in Albania

For decades, the center-right in Albania was less an ideological movement and more a resistance front against an oppressive, atheistic, and authoritarian regime. It was a movement of survival and defiance, forged in prisons, communist internment camps, and the unyielding spirit of families who preserved faith, tradition, and national pride in secret.

Before communism, elements of what nowadays we associate with conservatism stood at the center of Albanian society. Albanian society at the time was split into clans and alliances, waging directly or indirectly battles of influence and power among one another. Inside these communities and clans, and in the large households that were characteristic of the time, the bond was quite strong. These men and women would put a significant emphasis on faith, honor, family, respect, friendship and tradition. The word given was their bond in a tradition as old as the first Albanian in the region, called Besa. They had to strengthen these elements as the only way to survive throughout the centuries.

Nevertheless, for years after communism fell, conservatism continued to remain largely undefined as a structured political doctrine until recent years. After 10 years in opposition, under a systematic attack by a socialist government, with the backing of the international progressive community, and especially the Open Society Foundation, Albanian conservatives saw hope in the return of the historic leader of the center-right, former President and Prime Minister, Sali Berisha. He started a nationwide movement to remove the previous chairman of the DPA, Lulzim Basha, a puppet of the socialist Prime Minister, and make the Democratic Party (DP) a true conservative political force. The right-wing electorate, disappointed, discouraged, and nearly hopeless, needed encouragement from its historic leader. The promise of change, conservative ideas, and the charisma of Sali Berisha, who served as prime minister from 2005 to 2013, sparked the movement's awakening.

Conservatism is seen as a real chance to embrace change through a new vision that puts citizens, the national interest, and Albanian families first. It stands for cutting taxes, reducing public debt and spending, encouraging freer and fairer markets, restoring law and order, fighting corruption, and protecting individual freedoms. Albanians, in their nature, are a conservative people.

To that end, Sali Berisha asked a group of mainly young conservatives – the author of this paper among them – to create a political document that would stand at the center of the refounded Democratic Party. It was to be inspired by Edmund Burke, Russell Kirk, Roger Scruton, Frank Meyer, Milton Friedman, and many other conservative icons, and aim to organically fuse together all the philosophical and historical currents and groups on the right.

We did not want merely to copy from others. Our objective was to bring the knowledge and experience of American and European conservatives, the successful policies that had made Western societies prosperous, and adapt them to our reality, our history, culture and national identity.

When we started drafting the Constitution of Center-Right Values, we had two main goals: restoring civilized discussion of ideas in the country, and articulating an axis of values, ideas, principles for the largest center-right party in the country. We aim to become a part of the wider center-right and conservative network on both sides of the Atlantic and use our experience with communism and our quest to establish a proper conservative philosophy as an added value for Western societies. We have experienced what currently ails the West and can be a cautionary tale to prevent cultural Marxism from taking over the West.

The DP constitution begins with the idea that the individual is the smallest minority in society and the building block of every group. However, humans are also social beings. The individual is born into a family, a social context, a community, and a tradition. It is within these contexts that the individual forms bonds and builds an identity. The relationships that ground the individual are what conservatism seeks to protect. As Edmund Burke put it, society ought to be aware of the natural relationship between the living, the dead, and the unborn.

We also recognize that the individual is born with certain inalienable freedoms and rights, which are not granted to him by a bureaucratic structure, but by nature and God.

The conservative understands the vital role that tradition plays as a source of accumulated knowledge. This awareness constitutes one of the most fundamental distinctions between the Left and the Right. A leftist thinks that the individual can be perfected through rationalist mechanisms of the state. This can only be achieved through progressivism, which discards our past, tradition, knowledge, culture, and history, so that the state can guide a country towards perfection. The conservative recognizes that the traditional structures of the family, the community, and society are better equipped to nurture the individual than distant bureaucracies.

The Right, in our view, has two main pillars: Burkean conservatism (or traditionalism) and classical liberalism. Both represent the natural state of every man and woman, because both address the natural needs for freedom, familial, and traditional and historical attachments, as described above. Meanwhile, the Left seeks to impose an abstract ideology onto real life. In communism, the Left's most extreme form, these ideas are imposed by force.

All the thoughts, feelings, and inner states of a man or woman must be translated into a political offer, since politics is the environment where the individual addresses many of his problems. President Reagan provided this offer by adopting the fusionism proposed by William Buckley, Jr., founder of the iconic American conservative magazine, *National Review*, and its first editor, Frank Meyer. Fusionism is a philosophy that combines elements of classical liberalism and traditional conservatism. It seeks to merge the principles of limited government, individual liberty, and free markets with a respect for traditional values, social institutions, and cultural heritage.

Conservative traditionalists should note that the virtue or morality we hold dear is only truly good when it is freely chosen. We believe that without the individual freedoms that classical liberalism defends, the values that Burkean conservatism defends, whither.

On the other hand, classical liberals must recognize that individualism unbridled and uninformed by moral values decays and becomes unstable. Without the acceptance of a moral foundation, freedom becomes anarchy and can destroy a society. When not balanced by each other, the pillars of Western conservatism (classical liberalism and traditionalism) taken in isolation create the conditions for authoritarianism.

We had several discussions among ourselves. Would the DP be a primarily cultural one, rooted in family, tradition and honor or was it also a modern economic movement favoring free markets and limited government? We have libertarians and national conservatives in our party and movement. However, given our communist past, we all agreed that big-state interventionist policies, remnants of past socialist-leaning economic policies, and compromises with progressive civil society groups would be dismissed. For the reasoning above, we agreed to create a fusionist doctrine. The strong social and moral codes nurtured through centuries are combined perfectly with our sense of innovation, entrepreneurship, freedom and trade. Both sides are strong enough to balance and complement each other.

The Democratic Party must represent, defend, and promote the interests of all right-wing Albanians: from those whose property was forcibly taken by communists, to those who were politically persecuted, to descendants of true patriots of the pre-communist period, along with classical liberals, libertarians, and social conservatives. Our “Constitution of Values” does exactly that, laying out a map for how to create a society of opportunities and rule of law in which citizens can live freely and safely. We seek a society that respects the liberty and worthy representation of every Albanian citizen; a society that enables the economic and social development through supply-side economics and free markets. We seek to preserve the nation, the family, our cultural traditions, and religious diversity.

This requires a change in our economic system, from a net importer to a producer and exporter. Supply-side policies are needed to lower taxes for all, encourage local employment, manufacturing, investment, reduce government spending, drastically reduce debt, and decrease regulatory burdens and red tape. Industrialization and democracy go hand in hand.

Albanian conservatives have not had an easy journey. The rise of communists was not merely a political transformation; it was a systematic dismantling of Albanian society’s core—its faith, its traditions, and its family structures.

Under Enver Hoxha’s regime, Albania became one of the most isolated and oppressive communist states in the world. Religion, long a pillar of Albanian identity, was outlawed. Property was confiscated, and entire classes of people were branded as enemies of the state. The family unit, the backbone of Albanian society, was systematically undermined as the state sought to replace loyalty to kin with loyalty to the Party.

This cultural and spiritual devastation is something Albanian conservatism has sought to undo in the decades since communism’s collapse. The conservative instinct in Albania, while not always formally organized, has been to preserve and restore the values communism sought to destroy – faith, family, tradition, and a sense of national pride. These principles are not merely remnants of the past; they are the bedrock of a

free and prosperous future, and currently they are all once again in danger across European societies.

II. The Role of Strong Social Codes in Conservative Identity

Before any attempts to materialize and structure it, conservatism is a viewpoint, a way of thinking and acting. It is first and foremost an instinct. The instinct a newborn has to reach for his parents, the attachment an individual forms quite naturally from a very young age with his family, community and history, and the need to protect all of them.

In this regard, Albanians have strong qualities that we associate with conservatism today. They have a strong sense of family and community life. They have always had a deep sense of pride, for their history, national figures and achievements of many Albanians throughout the centuries. The most conservative aspect of all is the value of Besa – the word given.

The concept of Besa – a solemn promise of honor and integrity—has served as the bedrock of Albanian social and ethical life across many centuries. The home of the Albanian is of God's and guest's, is a famous phrase in the country. This principle has not only governed personal interactions but has influenced the broader societal and political frameworks in Albania. It reflects a conservative ethos where one's word is one's bond, emphasizing trust, loyalty, and the enduring value of personal and communal responsibility.

Respect for tradition and heritage is another cornerstone of Albanian conservatism. This respect manifests in the preservation of customs, folklore, and historical narratives that define the Albanian identity. From the Skanderbeg resistance against the Ottoman Empire to the preservation of the Albanian language during times of prohibition, this respect for the past underpins a conservative approach to change, advocating for evolution rather than revolution.

Family structures in Albania are traditionally strong, often extended beyond the nuclear family to include a wide network of relatives – called Fisi. The structure of this entity and of the households, the family roles, duties, and hierarchy were clearly defined and respected. It was not merely about familial ties but about the collective strength and support system these ties provided especially in Albania's darkest moments.

Through the family units, within the clans and larger structures, patriotism became deeply ingrained in Albanian society, not as blind nationalism but as a profound love for one's country, culture, and people. This patriotism fueled the instinct of many Albanians from Skanderbeg's times to the revolts against communism.

The Kanun, the de facto Constitution of Albanians before there even was an Albanian state, is the most representative symbol of conservatism in the country. It was a set of customary laws that governed aspects of life in many Albanian regions, especially in the north. While it gets a bad reputation sometimes, due to the blood feuds, it contained a wide range of social norms and regulations, including family life, hospitality, self-

governance, preservation of tradition, property rights, traditional gender roles, community and solidarity, duty and honor and justice. More than a legal system it can be considered a cultural code that has shaped Albanian identity more than anything. Respect for tradition, family life, honor and community remain strong even to this day mainly due to the legacy of the Kanuni.

However, the Kanun falls short, in my view, on innovation, competition and entrepreneurship. The Kanun was built for survival, not prosperity. Its rigid clan-based system is close to incompatible with free-market capitalism, which thrives on individual initiative rather than group loyalty.

Nevertheless, Albania's conservative movement should respect the Kanun's values while modernizing its application. The goal should not be to revive medieval structures but to channel their principles (honor, responsibility, and self-reliance) into a competitive, free-market economy.

In today's context, conservative values are not just about maintaining the status quo but about fostering a society where change is considered through the lens of what has historically worked for the Albanian people. It's about ensuring that modernization does not come at the expense of losing what makes Albanians unique. This balance between tradition and progress is what many Albanians strive for, ensuring that their conservative roots continue to nourish the tree of future growth.

One of the greatest intellectual articulations of this conservatism came from Branko Merxhani, the leading advocate of Neo-Albanianism. In the early 20th century, Merxhani warned against blind imitation of Western models, arguing that Albania must modernize organically, without sacrificing its cultural roots. He envisioned a strong, independent Albania, deeply connected to Europe but maintaining its unique traditions and national consciousness.

Merxhani lived through a period that was quite transformative for the country, witnessing the decline and fall of the Ottoman era, the country's independence, the interwar period and the King Zog era, the rise of communism and its invasion of Albania.

The height of his public work and contribution was during the 1920s and 1930s, when he advocated for a national renewal through his philosophy of Neo-Albanianism, as a response to the country's challenges in nation building, modernization and comprehensive development. He argued about the need to modernize and develop, without losing our identity and traditions. On the contrary, based on his thinking, by strengthening these elements, we could strengthen and develop the country.

The core principles of Neo-Albanianism included:

- The creation, strengthening and defense of a cultural and National Identity – Merxhani strongly believed that Albania's development should be rooted in its national spirit, by rediscovering and valuing our ancient traditions, history, myths and folklore. At the same time, he argued for prudence and even rejection of full imports of foreign models. As he wrote at the time, "we Albanians cannot build

a strong nation by blindly following Europe. We must preserve our essence, that which makes us Albanian”.

- Organic and prudent development – Branko Merxhani’s thesis on the development of Albania was an organic slow and prudent one, rejecting externally imposed or radical, revolutionary changes. According to him, “every healthy development comes from within the people themselves, not from changes imposed from outside”.
- The role of intellectual leadership – It is the role of representative elites and intellectuals to lead the changes in the country. He spoke against tribalism and political opportunism, calling for a generation of thinkers who dare to think freely and nationally.
- Relations with Europe and the West in general – Merxhani was an admirer of Europe’s and what the European civilization had brought the world in terms of art, culture, developments and governance. However, he noticed a sense of utilitarianism and materialism inside European societies, about which he warned on many occasions. He considered Europe a “great teacher” but warned against taking for granted everything that Europe brings. According to Merxhani, there was “spiritual degeneration” inside Europe that could negatively affect Albania in its fragile state.
- A fusion of modernity and tradition – Merxhani’s Neo-Albanianism sought to harmonize the country’s ancient traditions with the need for intellectual, scientific progress. Yet, he rejected both the blind preservation of outdated customs and the wholesale adoption of foreign practices. “A strong nation is built when we unite modern thought with our historical foundation.”
- Albania’s role in Europe – Merxhani pushed Albania to play a role in European matters based on its geographical location. “We are not small in terms of our history. Albania has a mission: to be a bridge between East and West, always preserving its essence.”
- The individual in the Albanian society – While community, tradition and history were a considerable part in his philosophy, Branko Merxhani considered the individual to play the most important role in a society, placing him at the center. “A healthy society begins with the enlightened individual. The first reform is that of the human spirit.”
- Education – No nation can prosper without a patriotic, scientific education. For Merxhani, “education is not merely for learning trades, but for building the character of a nation”.

His philosophy was never fully realized, as communism swept away any attempt at conservative thought, replacing it with class warfare, collectivism, and an assault on religion and property.

Yet the values Merxhani championed remained embedded in the Albanian psyche, surviving through family structures, historical memory, and the unbroken will of those

who refused to surrender their identity to the state. These elements continue to shape the conservative movement to this day, and are the basis of the Democratic Party ideology, even though not explicitly stated. Moreover, Merxhani's ideas can be of use to Europe as well, basically through three main lessons:

- National revival requires cultural self-confidence – nations can modernize without losing its soul
- Beware of European spiritual decline
- Economic progress must serve national strength

His warnings apply directly to modern Europe, where progressive ideologies threaten national traditions. For Albanian conservatives, we can adopt his philosophy to argue for integration into Europe while resisting cultural subversion.

It is in these roots that our added value for Europe lies. We bring the EU a case study in resisting communism and all its subproducts such as wokeism, cancel culture and totalitarianism; a pro-family model similar to Hungary's and a reminder that sovereignty matters, due to our experience with Soros-backed interference in our internal affairs to our detriment.

III. Communism's Attack on Conservative Values

The rise of communism in Albania was not merely a political transformation—it was a deliberate and systematic assault on every conservative pillar of Albanian life. Enver Hoxha's dictatorship was not satisfied with eliminating political opposition; it sought to reengineer the very fabric of society. Private property was abolished, religion was criminalized, and the family unit was subordinated to the all-powerful state.

The communists understood that traditional structures of loyalty—to family, faith, and national identity—were barriers to absolute state control. As such, they worked tirelessly to dismantle them. Parents were encouraged to denounce their children for "counter-revolutionary" thoughts; friendships were poisoned by fear of betrayal; entire social classes were deemed "enemies of the people" and exterminated or exiled.

The Albanian Communist Party established the harshest and most repressive totalitarian regime in Europe. All forms of dissent and opposition were eliminated. The Party through its net of spies called the Sigurimi managed to control the lives of all Albanians in the strictest of ways. The regime conducted purges against any perceived enemies of the state, including former landowners, intellectuals, religious figures, and anyone with ties to the pre-communist monarchy or Western influences. History in many cases was rewritten, while historical events and personalities, including many of the founding fathers of Albania were scrapped from all books. Private property was forcibly taken by the communists and destroyed. Everything belonged to the Party.

In 1967, Albania became the only country in the World that had atheism included in the constitution. The regime waged a propaganda war against God himself, because there could not be a higher being than the Dictator. It destroyed mosques and churches

and killed hundreds of clerics who chose not to be subdued by the communists and their anti-God war. The first to fall were the churches, and then the monasteries, because they were the first and strongest bastions of resistance, writes Friar Zef Pllumi in his book *Live to Tell*. But I would highlight another reason for their destruction. Places of worship provide education, enlightenment, refuge and a sense of inner peace and a strengthening of the soul. Communists wanted to destroy not only the body, but the soul. They wanted Albanians to forget who they were.

The communist regime tried – and in many ways succeeded – in creating the one it called the New Man, someone who belonged to the Party and ensuring a complete transformation of society. They tried to destroy the natural bonds that a human has with his or her past, tradition, history, community and family. For the Albanian individual, only loyalty to the Party existed. Everything else came second. Sibling turned against sibling, parent against children and friend against friend. Loyalty, trust, meritocracy and integrity were substituted with spying, betrayal, mediocrity and servility.

The goal was to make human beings soulless, subservient to the Party and the regime, no matter what the sacrifice. The new regime demanded not only obedience but worship. It was not enough to comply; one had to believe, or at least pretend to believe. Those who could not master this hypocrisy were eliminated.

Imagine a nation that has lived like this for close to five decades. The damage done to the identity and dignity of every Albanian is immeasurable and the time it takes to cure the soul of the citizens who lived at the time cannot be predicted. There is a simple reason why these identitarian elements were brutally attacked. If you remove the identity of a person by removing his past, his present ties with the family and the community, and his property, you have removed his sense of belonging. Then, that individual can be more easily controlled.

Of course, there were those who resisted and were persecuted and even killed for their perseverance. They saved our national dignity. If Albania has any hope of succeeding, it is because of the resistance and example of these brave souls, who stood out in the darkness of the regime. One of the biggest lessons of the time was that dying was not the worst thing. The worst thing was to live without hope, faith or love. The survivors of the horrors of communism showed that the regime took everything from them, except for the memories, and the will to live and persevere. Many that were imprisoned for their faith and belief, in the darkest cells and hours of their sufferings found faith to be their guiding light. All these elements Western societies have forgotten today. That is why the West is in decline, taking a road that will lead to its undoing.

Despite these efforts, the core values of Albanian conservatism endured underground. Families whispered prayers in secret, passed down censored histories to their children, and maintained the customs and traditions that defined their identity. When communism finally collapsed in 1991, these remnants of traditional Albanian conservatism re-emerged, but in an unstructured, often incoherent manner. The political right was dominated by figures who opposed communism but had not yet articulated a coherent conservative ideology.

IV. Post-Communist Struggles and the Rise of Conservative Thought

With the fall of communism, the Democratic Party of Albania emerged as the primary opposition force, rallying those who had suffered under the regime. However, rather than being a purely conservative movement, it became a broad anti-communist coalition, encompassing liberals, social democrats, and others united by their opposition to totalitarianism. The party successfully led efforts to liberalize the economy, privatize state assets, and integrate Albania into the West, yet it lacked a clear ideological identity beyond its anti-communist stance.

When it was formed, it was projected to be the main anticommunist party. Those who suffered from communism saw it as their natural home – yet it became a big tent party, oftentimes unable to hold a strict ideological line. Inside the party there have been conservatives, liberals, social democrats and people not belonging to a proper ideology. Only in recent years, with the return of the historic leader, Sali Berisha, has there been a clear willingness to make it a conservative party.

In the early nineties, the party led the efforts for market liberalization, privatization and the establishment of proper free markets to move people out of poverty. In 2005, it had all the traits of a classical liberal party, focusing on supply side economics, limited government, the low and flat tax, deregulation and a reduction of the public debt, with some elements of cultural conservatism in it, promoting national interest, anticommunism, defending our history and tradition. According to former Prime Minister Berisha, Ronald Reagan's policies and ideas were his guide during the governments of the Democratic Party.

Still, anticommunists have yet to regain their properties stolen by the communist regime, and most have not yet received compensation for the years under imprisonment. This is the group that has sought a more ideological party and are the biggest proponents of conservatism.

Yet, the year 2016 was when conservatism entered the public discourse by name and people became curious to learn what it meant, sometimes not understanding that the values they had defended in the past decades, or even centuries, were related to this concept. Another factor that led to the rise of conservatism in 2016 was the influence of the Open Society Foundation in Albania.

The Albanian branch of the OSF was established in 1992, with the aim of creating an open and democratic society after decades of communism. These were part of George Soros' broader goals of promoting open societies in post-communist countries, with a focus on democratic reforms, freedom of speech, human rights etc. They handed out scholarships and created civil society with their own people. Many members of the Open Society infiltrated all political parties.

However, it soon became clear that they were supporting the Socialist Party, and the current Prime Minister. Every other organization or individual in other parties became a tool for the benefit of the socialists and heirs of the communist politburo. In the past decade, they helped draft the judicial reform, which, according to the Democratic Party, many independent civil society experts and still independent media, gave all power in

the hands of the Prime Minister, financed by American and European taxpayers' money.

When President Trump singled out George Soros and his network as threats for conservatives, this piqued the interest of those on the center right in Albania. Soros had transformed Albania into his experimental garden, trying in the Balkan country everything he would later implement in the United States or elsewhere. At this time, Albanian conservatives became more interested in the policies and ideas that Donald Trump was promoting. This marked a turning point in the country, because there were many who organized and formed conservative groups. Conservative values and policies started being promoted by many in Albanian public life and self-identified conservatives began looking for allies in Europe and in the United States, including Prime Minister Viktor Orban in Hungary, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni of Italy, Nigel Farage in the United Kingdom, political parties such as Matteo Salvini's Lega, Jordan Bardella's National Front and many more.

This conservative awakening in the country coincided with the rise of wokeism, cancel culture and cultural Marxism in the West. Albanian conservatives noticed that many of the traits of these movements were blatantly communist. This encouraged them to raise their voices and denounce what was occurring in Western societies and try and prevent what Albanian conservatives has suffered under communism.

When former Prime Minister Sali Berisha returned into active politics one of his first promises was to transform the Democratic Party into a true conservative party, as explained at the beginning of this paper. This marked the first effort to institutionalize conservatism in a political party. It sanctioned the unequivocal defense of tradition, history and our culture and the strengthening of the individual and the Albanian family through low taxes, deregulation, encouragement of entrepreneurship and free and fair competition, the defense of the national interest, the sanctity of life and a return of law and order in our communities.

In recent years, there have been several organizations created with the aim of advocating for and spreading conservative values and policies, such as the Albanian Conservative Institute or the Albanian Coalition for Family and Life. Many intellectuals and politicians have become more vocal in many agoras, and there is an awakening with regards to conservatism.

Nonetheless, key challenges remain. Albanian civil society is mostly left-wing, financed by international progressive organizations, such as the Soros network and USAID. Historical textbooks are once again being written by Marxists and people who had official duties in the communist regime. The judicial system has plenty of communist prosecutors, waging lawfare against conservative politicians. Albania is suffering from massive depopulation, and an erosion of traditional family structures. Centralization of capital, of the means of production and decision making have resulted in an all-powerful socialist government, trying to marginalize conservative voices once again. Additionally, there are attempts to import left-wing notions such as wokeism and cancel culture in the country.

Organized crime has played a key role in keeping the Socialist government in power, during the last decade. Criminal networks have played a role in multiple facets of governance, from electoral manipulation to economic influence and corruption. Leaked wiretaps and investigative reports have repeatedly exposed collusion between high-ranking Socialist officials and criminal organizations, particularly in vote-buying and voter intimidation schemes. Criminal groups have been instrumental in mobilizing votes and ensuring electoral victories through illicit means.

The Socialist government has been accused of creating a system where criminal elements enjoy protection in exchange for financial and political support. Public tenders, strategic assets, and infrastructure projects have been distributed to businesses with ties to organized crime.

Albania has remained a major hub for drug trafficking in Europe, with state institutions failing to curb criminal networks involved in cocaine, cannabis, and heroin distribution. The laundering of illicit funds through construction projects and real estate has fueled an artificial economic boom, while ordinary citizens struggle with low wages and high costs. This situation has been helped by European and American officials who have closed an eye to the decline in every metric of democracy and human rights in Albania, for their own interests. As a consequence, European and American interests in the region have also been harmed by the irresponsible actions of unelected diplomats and bureaucrats that have supported the socialist government and attacked the conservative opposition.

Conservatives have promised to restore law and order in the country as soon as they get in government. History is on their side, as in 2005, once Sali Berisha became Prime Minister, his government declared war on all criminal gangs and in just 18 months, more than 1,000 leaders or members of 204 criminal gangs operating in the country were brought before the law.

When Albania joins the European Union, and even though we are a part of the European People's Party, we will be among the strongest allies of all conservative forces, in all the center-right groups, simply because these are the values we believe in. We will be strong advocates of the values that have founded the EU and of the western alliance. Albanians know full well what happens when conservative values are destroyed and when the ideas that founded western civilization are absent. We are committed to doing our part to bring these values to our country and help the west strengthen them.

The legacy of communism, and the continued presence in daily life of communist officials, coupled with the above mentioned challenges of an often-chaotic transition period and ongoing cultural and economic challenges continue being the biggest obstacles for Albanian conservatives. Nevertheless, developments in recent years, a greater organization and an attempt at defining Albanian conservatism, give hope for this movement and the impact it can have in Albania, the region and in the West.

In May 2025, Albania's Socialist Prime Minister Edi Rama secured a fourth term, with his Socialist Party (SP) winning 52.1% of the vote and 83 seats in the 140-seat parliament, surpassing their 2021 result of 74 seats. Rama's campaign, which critics claimed had no real political program, or any accountability on past promises and governance, was bolstered by a promise to pardon all government fines from 2015 to 2024, estimated to be worth EUR 200 million. The Socialist government also granted 138 licenses for cannabis cultivation and gave 760,000 pensioners EUR 100 each, triggering accusations of vote-buying.

The OSCE's preliminary report underscored these concerns, describing the election as competitive but unfair, with "widespread intimidation and misuse of public resources" by the Socialists, including pressure on public employees and voters. It noted self-censorship by journalists, a polarized campaign with divisive rhetoric, and irregularities in diaspora voting, particularly in Greece, where voters reported not receiving ballots despite large volumes of completed ballots arriving, the involvement of criminal gangs, as well as the patronage system, which is similar to Soviet - era practices. These findings, alongside the opposition's claims of an "electoral massacre," cast serious doubt on the election's integrity, suggesting Rama's victory partly relied on manipulation rather than a democratic mandate.

Nevertheless, despite the irregularities and reports of intimidation, the Democratic Party (DP), led by Sali Berisha, still captured 34.2% of the vote and 50 seats, consolidating a base for a national movement grounded in civic duty and traditional values.

The conservative electoral program of the Democratic Party is built on strong conservative values, emphasizing family, national identity, economic freedom, and the rule of law. It envisions a prosperous Albania that focuses on production and creating jobs, by reversing depopulation, strengthening institutions, reducing government overreach, and fostering a dynamic free-market economy. The program prioritizes tax cuts, lower public debt, energy independence, agricultural revitalization, and infrastructure development, including railways and ports. The focus is also on security, combating organized crime, restoring justice, and reinforcing Albania's strategic alliances with the West. Rooted in tradition, sovereignty, and economic self-reliance, this vision aims to create a thriving Albania for future generations and a worthy member of the EU.

Conclusion

Albanian conservatives have passed through many trials throughout the past century, growing from a natural way of behaving into the early stages of a more institutionalized form. Conservatives in the country have survived the original form of wokeism and cancel culture in their bloodier versions. Despite historical repression, the Albanian right has preserved the ideals of national sovereignty, family values, cultural heritage and the necessity for limited government and freer markets, even without realizing these values were associated to a single philosophy.

Currently, we are no longer just a reaction to communism, but a more structured movement ready to govern and transform the country. We seek a strengthened nation built on family, faith and national identity, through competitive free markets, deregulation, low taxes and a strong local industry. We can achieve a European Albania rooted in its traditions and history, just as Merxhani advocated for, and at the same time help Europe return to its values and what made it great.

