

## **Albania: New Premier Promises Reform**

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Faced with growing demands for an early election, the Socialist Party has chosen its third prime minister in just over a year

Albania's third Socialist prime minister since the 2001 general election is about to take office in one more desperate drive to overcome the dire economic plight of Europe's poorest country.

The ruling Socialist Party leadership decided on July 15 to nominate the head of the party, Fatos Nano, to become premier with a mission to advance his programme for fighting corruption, combating traffic in drugs and humans and totally reforming the public administration.

Without such a clear programme, the party fears it might be obliged to yield to growing pressure from public opinion and the political opposition to call early elections.

A change of government should be little more than a formality because the incumbent premier, Pandeli Majko, has agreed to resign. Nano himself said he was expecting a reshuffle "before the August vacation".

Nano's "Catharsis" movement inside the Socialist Party - which has been riven by divisions - managed to unseat former premier Ilir Meta's government in January this year. Nano had got on well with Majko before he took office, but subsequently the former continuously complained that the latter could do more to improve the economy.

The Socialists and the opposition Democrats of Sali Berisha recently reached an agreement on electing a president by consensus, as the European parliament had urged. This earned them a few approval points in Brussels but did not halt opposition demands for elections to be brought forward.

Because of the Socialists' internal crisis the country has had no real coherent government since elections in June 2001. Analysts say the Socialists now must resolve their problems and buckle down to the task of government if they want to stay in office until their term expires in 2005.

Ten years after the fall of communism, Albania is still afflicted with corruption, an inefficient public administration and a weak judiciary. Traffic is rife in drugs, arms and human beings.

Despite managing to convince the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to sign new agreements for the next three years, Majko's government, formed as a party compromise five months ago, failed to make any impact on poor living standards.

The country suffers from high unemployment, poor economic growth, low production and an energy crisis. It is heavily dependant on foreign aid and assistance. As a result, popular dissent has been growing.

In this climate, opposition calls for an early election have grown ever more insistent, with accusations flying about Socialist Party mismanagement.

"The Socialist Party has lost any moral right to govern the country because creating three governments in eight months is proof of its incompetence," said Berisha. "What's needed is not another government but another political solution."

Nano responded by promising that people will feel tangible improvements over the next six months. He said the country needed a more representative cabinet than the one headed by Majko, "The time has come for the Socialist Party to improve itself and its system of values," Nano said. He suggested that the adversarial tone of Albanian politics should be replaced with greater high-level consensus.

Some analysts believe he might well have a chance to serve out his full term. The Democrats, though stressing they will not vote for the new Nano government, seem less antagonistic than before. Nano has also an opportunity to include the party's most impressive personalities in his cabinet. And he might achieve the start of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement negotiations with the European Union, expected by September.

Promising a new package of reforms, Nano said the new government would fight to change the "over-informal character of the Albanian economy". It would tackle corruption and trafficking, strengthen the public administration, increase local and foreign direct investment and, last but not least, work more closely with the opposition. "We are determined not to allow the return of conflict either among us or at the national level," he said.

Nano's task, however, will not be smooth. Support for him has slipped even among his own

Catharsis group. He only narrowly managed to rally enough support in the party to remove his critic Petro Koci from the post of organisational secretary.

Despite all this, Nano persuaded his party to nominate him as head of government, warning that failure to do so could leave members facing the prospect of being thrown out in an early election.

Teodor Misha is publisher of the Tirana-based Albanian Observer magazine.

**Location:** [Albania](#)

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