

Albania: the escalation of the opposition's protests

Street protests are escalating against the government of Sali Berisha who, according to the opposition, rigged the results of the parliamentary election in June 2009. In Tirana, on 14 May another demonstration of the opposition Social Democratic Party (PS) was held. Approximately 10,000 people took part in it. Demonstrations were also organised in other towns in the country. A growing political crisis may affect the assessment of Albania's motion for EU membership.

Opposition protests have been taking place since the parliamentary election held on 28 June in 2009 and were won with only a slender majority of votes by the right-wing Democratic Party (PDSH). In spite of the positive assessment of the international community, the opposition party PS deemed the election fixed, boycotted the work of the parliament and is calling for a further counting of votes. This demand has been clearly dismissed by PDSH as illegal. The PS leader Edi Rama in April this year appealed for intensified protests, which has led to mass demonstrations and a beginning of a hunger strike by 200 followers and party MPs.

The prolonged political crisis is being increasingly severely criticised by Western countries and institutions (NATO, EU, Council of Europe, OSCE) that have – so far in vain – attempted to mediate between the parties in conflict. A long-term lack of political dialogue and the boycotting of the work of parliament by the opposition may affect the assessment of the motion about Albania's membership in the EU, submitted in April 2009. The political crisis draws into question the fulfilment of the political criteria of the accession by Albania (Copenhagen criteria). PS is hoping that the threat of rejecting the motion by the EU will force Prime Minister Berisha to accept the opposition's demands. However, when his unwillingness to reach a compromise is taken into account it appears quite unlikely.

<MarSz>