



REPUBLIKA E SHQIPËRIË

ASSEMBLY

Parliamentary Group of the Democratic Party

To: All the Diplomatic Corps accredited in Tirana
International Institutions

Subject: **Administrative-Territorial Reform in Albania:** Concern over the Unilateral Termination by the Parliamentary Majority of the Work of the Ad-Hoc Committee

Tirana, July 27, 2026

Your Excellencies,

Allow me to express my highest consideration for your work and, at the same time, to convey my serious concern regarding the conduct of the parliamentary majority in the process of reviewing the Administrative-Territorial Reform in Albania.

At the end of October 2025, the parliamentary majority and the opposition agreed to establish an Ad-Hoc Committee to review the Territorial Reform. The Committee was to operate based on consensus and to benefit from the specialised expertise of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe¹.

The Committee commenced its work immediately in November 2025 and, until July 2026, carried out its activities in a spirit of cooperation between the parties, organising a series of consultation roundtables across the country's regions. It approved, by consensus, a clear and binding work schedule, which was mandatory for implementation by all parties. However, due to time constraints, it was not possible to hold the consultation for the Tirana Region, where approximately one-third of Albania's population resides. Furthermore, several mayors of the country's largest municipalities elected from the Socialist Party (SP) did not appear before the Commission, including those of Fier, Vlorë, Elbasan, Shkodër, Lezhë, and Tirana. Meanwhile, several thematic consultations had been planned with interest groups, executive institutions related to local government, civil society organizations, and various communities that had requested to be heard by the Commission.

The Committee had been entrusted by the Assembly with several responsibilities, including the preparation of proposals for legislative amendments, and had been given a nine-month mandate, with the possibility of an extension should justified reasons arise.

Upon the expiry of this deadline, it became evident that, due to the substantial workload, **the Committee had been unable to complete its principal tasks. For this reason, the**

¹ Additionally, the European Union Delegation, the Embassy of Switzerland, and the Embassy of Sweden in Tirana provided their expertise and support.

opposition requested a three-month extension of its mandate, until 15 October 2026. Given that the Assembly is required to complete the Territorial Reform before November 2026, when the President of the Republic is expected to decree the date of the next local elections, this request was entirely reasonable.

Nevertheless, **the parliamentary majority decided to reject the request to extend the Committee's mandate and to proceed unilaterally by terminating the joint work within the Committee.** This decision is not supported by any convincing justification, particularly given that the Committee's work had continued constructively, in a spirit of cooperation, and that a considerable number of experts remained actively engaged in fulfilling its mandate.

Through this decision, the parliamentary majority unilaterally abandoned the principles of consensus and inclusiveness in relation to one of the country's most significant institutional reforms. This development constitutes a deeply concerning political signal, not only regarding the Territorial Reform itself, but also because it creates the impression that the governing majority is prepared to proceed with other fundamental reforms, including electoral reform, without political consensus.

As was the case in 2014, there is a risk that the review of administrative boundaries may be used to implement a territorial reconfiguration with electoral implications, thereby affecting the outcome of the forthcoming elections for mayors and municipal councils, and, indirectly, future parliamentary elections. Revising the boundaries of municipalities and regions without political agreement, without consensus, and without an inclusive and transparent process inevitably produces electoral consequences and creates advantages for the governing majority. Consequently, such a reform cannot be regarded as either sustainable or acceptable to all political stakeholders.

Such an approach is contrary to international standards in this field, to the requirements of the European institutions, to the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and to the obligations undertaken by Albania within the framework of its European Union accession process.

The European Parliament Resolution on Albania, adopted on 17 June 2026, emphasises that any reform in this field should be carried out through an inclusive and consensus-based process. Likewise, Resolution 2544 (2024) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the March 2026 Report of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe clearly state that changes to the number or boundaries of local self-government units must be based on broad consensus among the stakeholders, and that the unilateral and expedited revision of territorial boundaries is not in line with the applicable standards and guidelines of the Council of Europe.

In defence of these principles, and in continuation of the consistent support that your institutions have provided for strengthening democracy in Albania, **we would greatly appreciate any intervention or public appeal addressed to the Albanian authorities and**

the parliamentary majority, urging them to reconsider this decision, restore the mandate of the Ad-Hoc Committee until October 2026, and ensure that the Territorial Reform is completed through a fully inclusive, transparent, and consensus-based process. Any output produced by the Committee or the Assembly, before being submitted to the plenary session of the Assembly for adoption, should be certified by either the Venice Commission or the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, as the two institutions with the highest level of specialised expertise in this field.

The decision of 23 July 2026 to terminate the work of the Ad-Hoc Committee before the completion of its mandate undermines these principles and weakens the democratic legitimacy of the entire reform process.

The territorial organisation of a country must be founded upon broad political consensus, meaningful consultation, objective socio-economic evidence, and full respect for the principles of local self-government enshrined in European standards. Only a reform developed in accordance with these principles will enjoy the legitimacy necessary to strengthen local democracy, reinforce public trust, and advance Albania's European integration.

For the above reasons, please find attached a more detailed report setting out the arguments and evidence supporting the concerns expressed by the opposition in this letter.

Please accept the assurances of our highest consideration for you and the states or organizations you represent.

Respectfully,

Gazment BARDHI



Chairman

Democratic Party Parliamentary Group

REPORT

“The Administrative-Territorial Reform in Albania: Concern over the unilateral suspension of the work of the Special Commission by the majority”

I. Introduction

On 23 July 2026, the Socialist parliamentary majority voted against the opposition’s proposal to extend the mandate of the Ad Hoc Parliamentary Commission on Territorial Reform. Therefore, the Commission ceased to operate before completing the mandate entrusted to it by the Assembly of Albania. Its work programmed remained incomplete, the consultation process had not been completed, and the final report had neither been fully considered nor formally adopted by the Commission itself¹.

Despite these pending tasks, the governing majority decided to discontinue the Commission’s work and proceed without the cross-party consensus that had constituted the fundamental rationale behind its establishment.

The decision of the Socialist majority not to extend the mandate of the Ad Hoc Parliamentary Commission on Territorial Reform raises serious concerns regarding democratic governance, institutional inclusiveness, and the integrity of the reform process in Albania. This decision appears inconsistent with the repeated recommendations of the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and other international institutions, which have consistently underlined that reforms affecting territorial organization should be based on broad political consensus, meaningful consultations, objective criteria, evidence-based analysis, and full transparency.

Territorial reform represents more than a standard legislative initiative. It has direct implications for local democracy, citizens’ political rights, local representation, public administration structures, and, ultimately, the framework within which future electoral processes will take place. Due to its constitutional and political significance, European democratic standards require that such reforms be developed through inclusive

¹ At the time of the termination of its mandate:

- The Commission had not implemented its approved work programme.
- The consultation process had not been completed, including the consultations scheduled to take place in Tirana;
- A significant number of municipalities, local government associations, experts, civil society organizations, and other relevant stakeholders had not yet been heard. This also includes public hearings with local communities, in response to the numerous requests submitted to the Commission, as well as the implementation of a planned online survey with citizens;
- The Commission had not completed its review and assessment process;
- Most importantly, its final report had not been discussed, examined, or formally approved by the Commission itself. No legislative proposal had been submitted or discussed within the Commission.

parliamentary procedures, genuine stakeholder consultations, and broad political agreement.

From the outset, the Ad Hoc Commission was established as an inter-party parliamentary mechanism intended to facilitate dialogue and develop a consensual framework for territorial reform. However, instead of allowing the Commission to complete its work, the Socialist majority chose to terminate its mandate unilaterally, despite the opposition's request for an extension aimed at enabling the completion of the pending tasks.

This approach effectively limited the possibility of achieving a genuine political consensus and transformed a process designed as a shared parliamentary initiative into a process led exclusively by the governing majority.

Consequently, the issue was not failure to achieve consensus; rather, the conditions necessary for reaching consensus were undermined.

II. The Need for a Review of the Territorial Reform

The Administrative and Territorial Reform of 2015 represented the most profound intervention in the organization of local government in the Republic of Albania since the beginning of the decentralization process. Through the restructuring of the administrative map, the substantial reduction in the number of local government units, and the adoption of a new legal framework, the reform aimed to establish a more efficient, functional, and sustainable model of local governance.

At its core, the reform was not intended merely to alter administrative boundaries, but to build a new system of local governance based on decentralization, local autonomy, improved quality of public services, strengthened administrative and financial capacities of municipalities, as well as the creation of conditions for balanced territorial development and the country's European integration.

After a decade of implementation, it has become evident that the reform has not achieved the expected objectives. Several challenges continue to characterize the functioning of local government, with the most significant being the delivery of quality public services as close as possible to citizens, their genuine representation, local self-government, and the balanced development of the territory.

The demographic changes, accompanied by widespread depopulation, particularly in rural areas, remote regions, and economically disadvantaged communities, identified through the 2023 Population and Housing Census, the European Union integration process, economic developments, the increasing demand for high-quality public services, and the need for a more functional territorial organization make a review of the current local governance model necessary.

Expert analyses indicate that the reform succeeded in reorganizing the country's territorial structure through the reduction of the number of local government units and the establishment of 61 municipalities. However, the change in the administrative map was not accompanied by reforms of the same pace in administrative capacity-building, fiscal decentralization, the functional reorganization of public services, and the institutional strengthening of local government. Consequently, a significant part of the strategic objectives remained unfulfilled or were only partially achieved.

The reform failed to deliver the promised reduction of administrative costs and increase in efficiency. The number of employees in local government doubled, while fiscal decentralization remained incomplete and municipalities continue to have a high level of financial dependence on central government. Improvements in the quality of public services have been uneven among municipalities, while economic development and the mitigation of depopulation trends were not affected to the expected extent solely through changes in territorial organization.

Analyses also demonstrate that the reform focused primarily on changing administrative boundaries, while it was not accompanied by a comprehensive reform of decentralization, local finances, administrative organization, the local electoral system, and the second tier of local governance. As a result, many of the challenges identified today do not stem from the territorial map itself, but rather from the incomplete model of local governance. Many communities, particularly remote areas and those affected by depopulation, continue to face insufficient public services, weak local representation, and an increasing concentration of competencies at the central level.

Any structural reform must undergo a periodic evaluation process to identify its outcomes, limitations, and opportunities for improvement. Only through an evidence-based analysis grounded in facts, data, and good governance standards can a more functional, democratic, and sustainable model of territorial organization be developed.

In this context, the Assembly of Albania undertook the initiative to review the Administrative and Territorial Reform, with the aim of developing a new model that is sustainable and evidence based. This constitutes a clear indication that even the original proponents of the reform acknowledge, after ten years, the need for its reassessment.

Since it was adopted unilaterally, the reform was largely perceived as having been designed to serve the electoral interests of a single political party rather than as a comprehensive reform aimed at serving citizens' interests. This concern is further reflected by the fact that the governing majority currently controls 55 out of the 61 municipalities.

Such a reform cannot be limited solely to changes in administrative boundaries or the number of municipalities. It must comprehensively address institutional organization, competencies, financing mechanisms, democratic representation, the provision of public services, and the relationship between different levels of governance.

III. Stakeholder Commitment to the Consensus-Based Implementation of Territorial Reform

A decade after the unilateral adoption by the current majority of the 2014 Administrative-Territorial Reform in Albania, which reduced the number of local government units from 373 municipalities and communes to 61 municipalities, the Assembly of Albania assessed that the country requires a review of this reform.

By consensus within the Assembly of Albania, in October 2025 the Special Parliamentary Commission on Administrative-Territorial Reform was established. The Commission was designed with two co-chairs representing the governing majority and the opposition, as well as an equal number of members from both sides. Furthermore, at the request of the opposition, it was agreed that the decision adopted by the Assembly would explicitly provide that the Commission should seek to achieve consensus-based decision-making on all matters under its review, and that, for specific issues where consensus could not be reached, the expertise of the Venice Commission and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe could be assessed and requested.

The consensual decision of the Assembly assigned the Commission several specific tasks, including reviewing the quality and accessibility of local public services; ensuring alignment with the European Union acquis and cohesion policies; conducting a comprehensive and transparent consultation process; and presenting draft legislative proposals to the Assembly. The timeframe established for the completion of these tasks was nine months, with the possibility of extending this period where justified reasons existed.

It is important to acknowledge the achievements of the Commission during its functioning. It established a formal bilateral forum for dialogue, maintained — following concerns raised by international partners — the principles of co-chairmanship and numerical balance, brought the consequences of the 2014–2015 reform back onto the parliamentary agenda, and organized a limited number of regional public hearings. Furthermore, it enabled two distinct visions regarding local governance to be clearly reflected and debated in the public discourse.

IV. International Standards in This Area and Calls from International Organizations

The approach pursued by the governing majority is inconsistent with European standards for the development of a long-term and broadly accepted reform, as well as with the findings and recommendations of several international institutions.

- **In its Resolution (2025/2250(INI)) on Albania, adopted by the European Parliament on 17 June 2026**, the European Parliament, among other points, stated that it: *“welcomes the ongoing work of Albania’s inter-party parliamentary committee on territorial reform; stresses that any reform in this area should be developed through an inclusive process and based on objective socio-economic criteria, as well as on European standards of local self-*

government. ... Encourages increased transparency in legislative procedures and the development of more meaningful consultations, at an early stage, with civil society organizations, social partners and independent institutions. Stresses that progress in the EU integration process must not come at the expense of the quality and inclusiveness of reforms. Underlines the importance of the appropriate engagement of stakeholders, to ensure sustainable implementation and long-term impact.”.

- **In its 2025 Country Report on Albania, the European Commission** also welcomed the establishment of the inter-party Parliamentary Commission on Territorial Reform, within the broader framework of public administration reforms in Albania. At the same time, the Commission identified persistent structural weaknesses affecting local self-government, including: the continued centralization of public functions; insufficient financial autonomy of municipalities; limited administrative capacities at the local level; the continuing impact of the 2015 territorial reform; and the need to improve the legal framework governing local government. Consequently, the Commission presented territorial reform as part of a broader process aimed at strengthening local democracy, rather than merely as a change of administrative boundaries.

- **The European Commission’s IBAR Report** notes that:

“The European Union takes note of the establishment of a dedicated Inter-Party Parliamentary Commission on territorial reform.”

- **In the Report of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, adopted in March 2026** following a fact-finding visit to Albania, the following observations were made:

“93. As noted above, the Albanian Parliament established the Territorial Reform Commission in 2025 with the aim of developing principles and steps for the future transformation of the administrative division. At the time of the monitoring visit, a recurring criticism of the reform was that local self-government associations lacked clear information regarding the planned changes, despite the government’s intention to implement them by July 2026. Consequently, serious concerns were raised regarding the feasibility of the reform — which is expected to lead to further mergers of local government units — within such a short timeframe.

94. According to the rapporteurs’ observations, the planned territorial reform is a source of division among local government units, which may be partly attributed to the high level of political polarization in the country. While the government expects the reforms to strengthen local government capacities to fulfil its responsibilities and increase efficiency, some interlocutors emphasized that the results of the territorial reform undertaken a decade earlier had not been carefully assessed.

95. Regarding the merger of municipalities and changes to administrative boundaries, legal safeguards exist to ensure prior consultation with the affected municipalities. These measures are in line with the requirements of Article 5 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. However, as highlighted above, there is a risk that, during the preparation of the territorial reform planned for 2026, only formal consultations rather than genuine and

meaningful consultations may take place, if the government seeks to comply with the announced implementation deadline.

96. Considering the above, we emphasize that particular attention must be given to ensuring full compliance with Article 5 during the preparation and implementation of the planned territorial reform.”.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe identified several structural weaknesses affecting local democracy, including: the continued centralization of competences and public services; the partial implementation of the subsidiarity principle; the lack of full and exclusive competences for municipalities; insufficient financial autonomy; inadequate administrative capacities; consultation mechanisms that often remain formal rather than genuinely participatory; and the absence of a comprehensive assessment of the 2015 territorial reform prior to initiating a new restructuring process.

• **In Resolution No. 2544 (2024) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**, it is stated, among other points:

“4. The Assembly calls on the Parliament and the Albanian authorities, based on broad consensus among all political forces, to: 4.3 agree on the determination of new electoral district boundaries, as provided for by the 2020 Electoral Code, through an inclusive process that fully respects international standards.

6. The Assembly notes that various political forces in Albania are considering possible adjustments to the administrative-territorial map, both to further increase the efficiency of local self-government and to address some unintended consequences of the reform. It is important that any changes to the number of municipalities or their boundaries be based on broad consensus among stakeholders, while respecting the logic of the reform aimed at creating strong and effective local government capable of delivering services close to citizens.

7. In this context, the Assembly expresses concern that the administrative and territorial reform has had a direct impact on the enjoyment of minority rights in Albania. Several municipalities where minorities constituted the majority of the local population have been merged with larger municipalities where these minorities no longer constitute a majority, or even a significant proportion of the population. This situation is further aggravated by the fact that certain key minority rights, such as the right to education in the minority language and the right to use the minority language in local government matters, are guaranteed at the local level only when the respective minority population exceeds 20% of the municipality’s population. This threshold is considered high and is met only in a very limited number of municipalities with significant minority populations. This issue should be addressed in close consultation with the minorities concerned, including within the framework of any consideration of possible changes to the administrative-territorial map.

8. The Assembly takes note of the findings of the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities’ report on Albania, adopted on 22 September 2021, including those concerning the division of functions and responsibilities between central government and local authorities, as well as the financial autonomy of municipalities. It calls on the Albanian authorities to fully address the concerns and recommendations contained in that report.”.

V. The Deliberate Undermining of the Commission's Work by the Majority

The spirit of cooperation established through the creation of the inter-party Ad Hoc Commission did not translate into common findings, agreed principles, or a joint legislative proposal, because the Commission's work was still ongoing and was unilaterally interrupted. As a result, the shortcomings of the process became even more significant. The Commission did not conduct a comprehensive and independent assessment of the impact of the existing territorial reform on the delivery of public services, municipal finances, administrative capacities, demographic decline, or the distribution of responsibilities between central and local government. Tirana — the largest municipality in the country — did not report before the Commission, while several other major municipalities in northern and southern Albania were also absent from the process. Although the agreed work programme provided for detailed hearings with municipalities, local government associations, experts, civil society organizations, interest groups, affected communities, and responsible institutions, these consultations were not carried out.

Despite the continuous efforts of the opposition co-chair to preserve a consensual process, the majority increasingly relied on its numerical advantage to narrow or set aside elements of the previously agreed work programme. Therefore, the Commission failed to establish common criteria for territorial reorganization and failed to develop an agreed package addressing municipal competencies, fiscal decentralization, local revenues, and the provision of public services. It also failed to define a credible roadmap, supported by both sides, for the next phase of the reform process.

As the process evolved, the debate gradually shifted from the question of how local government should function towards discussions focused primarily on municipal boundaries and the possibility of mergers. From our perspective, this created a serious risk that territorial organization would be assessed mainly through its potential electoral effects, rather than being guided by objectives such as improving citizens' access to services, strengthening democratic representation, and respecting the principle of subsidiarity. The opposition does not reject changes to administrative boundaries in principle. However, we believe that any such changes must be based on objective evidence, preceded by genuine consultations with affected municipalities and communities, and form part of a broader programme of functional and fiscal decentralization.

On 15 July 2026, which marked the end of the nine-month period assigned for the Commission's work, the Commission had only completed the first phase of formal regional consultations, while excluding Tirana County, where approximately one-third of the country's population resides, as well as consultations with only a limited number of mayors across the country. No draft proposal had been discussed by the Commission, and no legislative proposal had been presented or reviewed by it.

For this reason, the opposition proposed during the Commission's meeting that the Assembly be requested to extend the Commission's mandate, given that the Commission had not been able to complete its assigned tasks.

Meanwhile, the majority proposed considering the Commission's work as completed, even though it had not fulfilled the duties assigned by the Assembly's decision and subsequently proposed that legislative initiatives be prepared unilaterally by individual members of Parliament and proceed through the ordinary legislative review process.

In other words, the majority changed its position, seeking to ensure that the legislative process for implementing the reform would no longer be inclusive, but rather unilateral, repeating the approach through which the 2014 reform was also adopted without consensus. That reform ultimately became widely perceived as being driven primarily by electoral considerations, without a comprehensive and transparent process involving communities, civil society, interest groups, responsible institutions, and, above all, without the specialized expertise of the Venice Commission and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

The process creates the impression of a predetermined outcome. These procedural shortcomings indicate that the outcome of the territorial reform had been politically determined before the Commission had completed its work. Instead of functioning as a genuine mechanism for dialogue, consultation, and consensus-building, the Commission appears to have served as a formal procedural step prior to the implementation of decisions already taken by the governing majority. In this way, the Commission was deprived of its essential democratic purpose.

The parliamentary process that the majority intends to pursue further has also failed to demonstrate that the territorial reform to be proposed unilaterally is based on objective evidence. To date, no methodology has been made public explaining:

- the socio-economic criteria that will determine municipal boundaries;
- demographic trends;
- assessments of administrative capacities;
- the financial sustainability of municipalities;
- public service delivery indicators;
- cost-benefit analyses;
- territorial impact assessments;
- or a comprehensive evaluation of the outcomes of the 2015 territorial reform.

This lack of information is particularly significant, given that the European Parliament explicitly requested that territorial reform be based on objective socio-economic criteria, while the Council of Europe identified the absence of an adequate assessment of the previous reform before initiating a new one. Without objective criteria and a transparent methodology, it becomes difficult to demonstrate that the reform serves the public interest rather than political considerations.

In summary, the Commission failed in completing an administrative-territorial reform process. Its main achievement was the preservation of a temporary bilateral framework, the collection of a limited amount of evidence, and the confirmation of the need for a serious

reassessment of the current system. Its main shortcoming was the inability to transform this process into a consensual, evidence-based reform proposal oriented towards citizens' interests. Instead, the Commission concluded its mandate without completing its work.

VI. The Role of the Opposition in the Process and Our Genuine Commitment

The opposition participated in the Commission with the understanding that territorial boundaries represented only one element of a much broader reform process. Our objective was to assess whether municipalities possess the necessary competencies, financial resources, administrative capacities, and democratic legitimacy required to effectively serve citizens. We consider strengthening decentralization not merely as an institutional preference, but as an essential instrument for bringing decision-making and public services closer to citizens, increasing accountability, and supporting the long-term economic and social sustainability of local communities.

In our assessment, any review of the reform should begin with a public and comprehensive evaluation of the 2014–2015 reform, meaningful consultations with municipalities, local government associations, and citizens, the publication of the data and criteria upon which any proposal is based, as well as a credible package for the transfer of competencies and adequate financial resources to local government. These conditions are essential to ensure that any future reform is consistent with the European Charter of Local Self-Government and with the obligations arising from Albania's European Union accession process.

This position of the opposition is consistent with the latest assessments of European institutions. The European Commission's 2025 Country Report on Albania concluded that only limited progress had been achieved in implementing the Cross-Sectoral Strategy for Decentralization and Local Governance 2023–2030. While acknowledging the 2024 municipal salary reform and measures aimed at strengthening financial discipline, the report emphasized the continued need to increase municipalities' own-source revenues and establish sustainable long-term financing mechanisms. Similarly, monitoring observations by the Council of Europe highlighted that municipalities and their representative associations had received very limited information regarding the planned reform, despite the intention to implement it by the summer of 2026. They also warned that excessively short deadlines risked reducing consultations to a merely formal exercise and questioned the feasibility of further municipal mergers without adequate preparation.

For this reason, the opposition engaged in the work of the Special Commission in a fully constructive manner, offering its cooperation and fulfilling the role expected of it in a democratic society.

The approach of the governing majority was not unexpected for the opposition. This parliamentary majority has, on no occasion, pursued a path of genuine cooperation and consensus-building; rather, it has continuously sought to reduce the role of the opposition to a formal presence rather than ensuring its meaningful participation in parliamentary activity.

Nevertheless, we engaged in this process in good faith, fully believing that the conduct of the majority could be different in this particular case, given that Albania has entered an advanced stage of negotiations for European Union membership. We also believed that, for the European Commission, an Administrative-Territorial Reform designed and adopted unilaterally and primarily for electoral purposes would be unacceptable.

We firmly believe that the reform must serve Albanian citizens and not political calculations. A comprehensive and transparent consultation process must be guaranteed to ensure the quality of the reform and to ensure that it benefits citizens and improves the quality of services delivered to them. Furthermore, reforms of this nature require the highest level of expertise, which can be ensured only through the involvement of institutions such as the Venice Commission and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. The opposition has requested and continues to insist on the engagement of this expertise, calling for every outcome of the process to receive the assessment and certification of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

VII. The Breakdown of Consensus and the Majority's Objective of Electoral Advantage

Through the request submitted by the Co-Chair of the Commission under Protocol No. 3188, dated 23 July 2026, an extension of the Commission's mandate by an additional three months (until 15 October 2026) was proposed, including the suggestion that the Commission continue its work during the month of August. The Assembly has sufficient time to complete this process until November 2026, when the President of the Republic is expected to decree the elections. Therefore, there is no legitimate justification for terminating the Commission's work and pursuing a unilateral approach.

This request was rejected by the majority on the same day, during the plenary session of 23 July 2026, reaffirming its intention to undermine consensus without any legitimate reason, terminate the Commission's work before fulfilling its assigned tasks, and proceed unilaterally with one of the country's most important reforms.

In this manner, the parliamentary majority in Albania chose to abandon consensus on the Territorial Reform, which represents one of the most significant institutional reforms in the country. This constitutes a highly concerning political signal, not only in relation to this reform itself, but also as an indication that the governing party may be prepared to proceed with electoral reform without consensus as well.

Territorial reform is now expected to be addressed by the Committee on Legal Affairs, where the Socialist majority holds sufficient votes to proceed without consensus in approving the new municipal map and the relevant legal framework, and subsequently adopt it with the three-fifths majority that it currently controls. Like the approach followed in 2014, there are concerns that this process may be used to implement a territorial reconfiguration with

electoral implications, potentially affecting the outcome of the upcoming local elections for mayors and municipal councils.

In practice, territorial reform will directly determine the framework within which the next local elections will be conducted. The revision of municipal and regional boundaries without political agreement, without consensus, and without an inclusive and transparent process inevitably carries electoral consequences and creates advantages for the governing majority, not only in the forthcoming local elections but also in parliamentary elections. Changes to boundaries or a reduction in the number of regions (while simultaneously increasing their size) directly affect key characteristics of the electoral system for general elections. If such changes are pursued unilaterally within the framework of territorial reform, they would circumvent the consensus-based procedures that should apply to fundamental and long-term reforms.

VIII. The Consequences for Electoral Reform

The implications extend beyond the territorial reform itself.

Municipal boundaries determine local political representation, while regional boundaries have a direct impact on the delineation of parliamentary electoral districts and the allocation of parliamentary mandates. For this reason, a territorial reform adopted unilaterally shortly before the next elections would have direct electoral implications.

The decision to terminate the Commission's work also sends a broader political signal regarding the future of electoral reform. If consensus has been abandoned in one of the country's most important institutional reforms, there is legitimate concern that the same approach may also be followed in the case of electoral reform, despite the repeated recommendations of ODIHR, the Venice Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council of Europe that electoral legislation should be adopted through broad political consensus.

This concern is particularly significant given that territorial reform will establish the framework for the 2027 local elections and may also affect the territorial basis of future parliamentary elections if regional boundaries are subsequently modified.

IX. Conclusions

The issue is no longer simply that consensus was not achieved. The issue is that consensus was never genuinely allowed to be established. The Ad Hoc Commission was prevented from completing its work.

- The consultations remained incomplete.
- The approved work programme was not fully implemented.
- The final report was neither discussed nor formally adopted by the Commission itself.

Nevertheless, the governing majority chose to terminate the process and proceed unilaterally. Taken together, these circumstances indicate that the outcome of the reform had been politically predetermined. Instead of strengthening confidence in the reform process, the approach adopted has weakened the institutional role of the Assembly, reduced public trust in democratic decision-making, and moved away from the standards consistently promoted by Albania's European partners.

For a reform that reshapes the territorial organization of the country and directly affects the functioning of local democracy and future elections, legitimacy is as important as legality. Without broad political consensus, meaningful consultations, objective socio-economic evidence, transparent parliamentary review, and formal approval of the Commission's conclusions, the credibility of the entire reform process is fundamentally compromised.

In defence of these principles, and in continuation of the consistent support that your institutions have provided towards strengthening democracy in Albania, we would welcome any intervention or public appeal addressed to the Albanian authorities and the parliamentary majority to reconsider this decision, restore the mandate of the Special Commission until October 2026, and ensure the completion of the Territorial Reform through a fully inclusive, transparent, and consensus-based process.

Any outcome produced by the Commission, before being approved by the plenary session of the Assembly, should be assessed and certified by either the Venice Commission or the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, as the two most specialized bodies in this field.

The decision of 23 July 2026 to terminate the activity of the Ad Hoc Special Commission before the completion of its mandate undermines these principles and weakens the democratic legitimacy of the entire reform process.

The territorial organization of a country must be based on broad political consensus, meaningful consultations, objective socio-economic evidence, and full respect for the principles of local self-government enshrined in European standards. Only a reform designed in accordance with these principles will have the necessary legitimacy to strengthen local democracy, increase public trust, and advance Albania's European integration process.

We remain at your disposal to provide the Commission's documentation, records of hearings, and the opposition's detailed recommendations. We would also welcome the opportunity to further discuss these issues in support of a reform process that is transparent, evidence-based, and fully aligned with European standards.

Tirana, July 27, 2026

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