



DECLARATION OF THE ALBANIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE IN VIEW OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF APRIL 25, 2021

The parliamentary elections offer a concrete opportunity to exercise participation in the democratic life of the country. The challenge of all electoral processes is to ensure honest and transparent elections, conducted with respect for every vote and every voter, and equally for the final result. The Catholic Church attaches importance to elections held in accordance with democratic principles and with the participation of all political parties and players. As on past occasions, in the light of our responsibility to guide the people entrusted to us, we, Bishops of the Catholic Church, ahead of the forthcoming elections scheduled for April 25, 2021, hereby extend our message to all the Catholic faithful and men and women of good will.

We are aware that the newly elected representatives will be faced with a number of challenges. The first challenge is the COVID-19 pandemic in our Country. Our gratitude goes to the doctors, nurses and health care workers, along with the family members of the those infected, who stood by their side day and night, risking their lives. At the same time, effective psychological and social support strategies are needed to successfully overcome this pandemic.

At the political level, *the justice reform*, still only on paper, should be implemented as soon as possible. *Strengthening and improving the efficiency of State institutions* is a primary responsibility of the newly elected representatives.

In the social sector, we cannot fail to mention the grave hurt of *young people and families leaving Albania*. Special efforts are needed throughout the country, from North to South, in rural and urban areas marked by situations of extreme poverty, lack of basic infrastructure and services, notably roads and health facilities.

We are particularly concerned about the level of education in many parts of the Country and the living conditions of some segments of the population. Many families are still suffering the consequences of the earthquake of 2019. *Reconstruction*, which necessarily needs to proceed at a faster pace, must be a top priority.

Albania can look forward to a brighter future if we all join forces, citizens and politicians.

A concerted effort is needed to eradicate *corruption*, which, as underlined by international institutions over the past few days, remains a threat to Albania's institutions and to the whole of society.

Despite all the progress made in the last 30 years, the European integration of Albania is yet to be accomplished.

In the run-up to the elections, as Shepherds, we call on everyone to participate in this expression of democratic life. According to the Social Doctrine of the Church this is a right and a duty of every citizen, to be exercised in full freedom, in compliance with existing laws. There is therefore a moral obligation to vote, regardless of each citizen's preference.

Secondly, as we have said in previous declarations, *the buying and selling of votes* is a serious sin that must be uprooted. Whoever sells his or her vote to obtain money has sold his or her dignity and that of his or her family. Moreover, those who buy votes, taking advantage of poorer citizens, are undeserving of the office they seek to be voted for. Moreover, the fact that, in addition to monetary payments, an oath is sworn on the Sacred Texts is unacceptable. It is likewise unacceptable that votes be cast under threat or in return for a promised job. Jobs are earned through meritocracy and not through party politics or political activism.

We believe that it is unwise to vote for candidates with a shady past. Moral integrity must be a necessary prerequisite for voters to make a free and serene choice.

It is our hope that on April 25 everyone will exercise their right and duty to vote bearing in mind the common good, which is also the purpose of every political activity. At the same time, we pray to God that, through the intercession of the Mother of Good Counsel, He may help the people of Albania at this important moment in the life of the country.

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The Catholic Bishops of Albania

(original text in Albanian)