

EDITORIAL

Democracy and free elections _____

_____ *Assoc. Prof. Dr. Juelda LAMÇE* _____

This edition is dedicated to democracy and free elections as cornerstones of a free and just society. It incorporates contributions that delve into the intricate dynamics of law, politics, and governance. In the specific, they focus on the right to vote, the role of political parties in democratic systems, the threat of populism, clientelism, corruption, citizen awareness and other stimulating cutting-edge issues. Selected research papers address challenges on election systems in Albania and abroad, identifying strengths and weaknesses of different system and potential avenues for improvement. Protecting the sanctity of the right to vote, not just as a fundamental human right but also a means to verify the proper functioning of democracy, implies removing barriers to participation, combating voter suppression, and upholding the integrity of the electoral process. Sustaining liberal democratic values necessitate addressing the rising challenge of populism as well, while reaffirming the importance of institutions, checks and balances, and the protection of individual freedoms. In the meantime, breaking the cycle of clientelism and rooting out corruption demand collective efforts from civil society, the media, and law enforcement agencies. A transparent and accountable system will ensure that the interests of the people are truly represented and protected. With this regards, collective efforts and unwavering commitment from all stakeholders – the government, political parties, civil society, and the citizens themselves - are indispensable for a robust democracy and an improved electoral system. To preserve their integrity, citizens are required to actively participate, demand accountability, and stay vigilant against threats that erode democratic values.