

# End of Transition, but Failure to Democratize: Democratic Consolidation in Albania Analyzed in the Frame of Political Elite Normative Preference for Democracy

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## Abstract

Albania is an exceptional case study for exploring democratic consolidation as the country has a unique political history, a *sui generis* case. This means that the country's history during the last decades consists of various government transitions from autocratic to democratic and yet losing the democratic quality, thus it failed to consolidate the democracy. The main goal is to investigate democratic consolidation process under the frame of political elite's role and normative preference for democratic consolidation assessment. I will use qualitative analysis involving of theory consuming engaging the questions of, if recently Albania ended a long transition, but still failed to democratize. What are the main trajectories or the path of the future of democratic consolidation? Albanian political elites have lacked good alternatives and clear policies, which has been accompanied by a systematic abuse of power, reflected in poor and ineffective governance and in the failure to implement the promised reforms. Under this assumption, strong and reliable elite's decision-making are important in explaining the consolidation of democracies but not sufficient to guarantee consolidation. I will try to explore a few aspects of democratic consolidation in Albania, in terms of strength of democratic values represented by the ruling elites. Recently, with the historical events of present elections could be assumed the end of transition in Albania. Paradigms of changes of old elites, and establishment of state of law, could possibly open some trajectories for democratic consolidation.

**Keywords:** paradigms, Albania, democratic consolidation, political elites, trajectories for democratic consolidation, democratic quality

## **Introduction**

### **Political Background**

With the end of communist era it started the point of a new era or a new agenda for Albania. These events started the transition agenda toward the democratization process, involving rebuilding of economy based on a new capitalist model, reshaping the mechanisms of financial model, new relations between government and the civil society, and the separation of the judiciary system from the control of the state. Anyhow, under these provisions of the economic and political reforms, did put on track the building up of political and financial relations with liberal democracies and financial institutions, considering them as a guarantor and instructor to successfully fulfill the required reforms (Lipset, S. M., & Lakin, J. M. 2004). With no previous democratic knowledge in building institutions and shaping civic society, total lack of political culture, due to an extreme impediment of the communist political regime, as well as no dissidents, Albania looked for partnerships with international countries and institutions to provide the vital help to a launch solid and safe transition to democracy. These instructions would had somehow provided the foundation and the expertise to guide the new political class and the society overall, to successfully and rapidly end the transition period (Fischer, J. Bernd. 2012).

In the west political arena and even at the academic level were many who believed that establishing and consolidating a democratic order would be something quite easy and fast, and that the dominating feature of the democratic consolidation such as rule of law, equality and freedom and market economy, under the frame of liberal doctrine, would quickly become features of any the societies in transition (Geoffrey Pridham, E. H. 1997). Embracing the western liberal doctrine was seen as a change in the boundaries of political culture in relation with the state-building process. Preliminary image of the post-communist transition was full with approximations of a quick and easy period of transition, and seemed to delivered a sense of euphoria even in academic research and studies (Carothers, 2002).

It proved, during the course of post-communist history, that these great hopes, were intended to fail and create a disillusion over many people in the Eastern bloc. It is wise to say that the predominant expectations and estimates about the post-communist transition have largely been constructed on the unexperienced supposition that democracy and capitalism are items for export and could easy be equally implemented, such as in Western democracies. It was believed that the transition process in these countries would not take long, to some degree a decade or less (Carothers, 2002). This was a generalized view, which considered that would be applied uniformly in all the post-communist region without taking in consideration the specific conditions and circumstances of each country. It dealt with the idea that certain countries that opened early the process were successfully in the implementation period and this could work both wise and would have the same effect in other countries as an easy process. Time and present experience demonstrated that

none of these setups were held and implemented as desired (Carothers, 2002). The failure of these overwhelmed expectations, hopes and illusions has been confirmed as the democracy promoters, academics and researchers are giving a different approach in understanding what is wrong with the paradigm of transition. Why it doesn't apply equally as follow up process that should any country go through? On the realm of political analysis of the transition paradigm studies, most of its content rely on structuralist approach and preconditions of democracy, also free and fair elections, free market economy etc. (Diamond, L. 1993). Such process would almost resemble as a chart or manual of instructions to fulfill the paradigm. At first have a predisposition to adopt the approach that some alterations, mostly on an economic sphere, would facilitate the transition to free market economy, and would produce not only a free and steady market economy, but also an effective democracy. It seems at first glance that the role of state-building is undermined a bit as they focus on the trajectories of the path itself as a purely teleologic approach to the desired end, the desired and imagined trajectories toward democracy (Carothers 2002, 716). The process had proved to be more complex and the results in many countries have raised an ambiguity on the original overwhelmed belief.

Most of the focus that is based on the transition paradigm, above all put emphasis on a fulfillment of institutional structure through reforms such as judicial reform, parliamentarism and the quality of political discourse, civil society emancipation and engagement, independent media and its role on public transparency as a guarantor of freedom of speech, political party development and its internal democracy also the process of leadership election base on meritocracy, electoral structure, independent and ethical electoral institutions(Krasniqi, A, Hackaj, A, 2013). Generally, it is observed that the paradigm did not uniformly gave the successful results in countries that experienced difficulties during transition. Only few countries out of many had a quick and smother transition mostly as an attribute to their preexisted liberal cultural heritage and early contact with market economy (Alexander, G. 2002).

Also, Albania does fall on category of the difficult experiences during transition. Paradoxically, numerous experiments, intended to contribute at strengthening the state, have certainly resulted in weakening of the state itself and its institutional structure. On the account of some historical moments, especially during the civil unrest in 1997 the state has ended up losing its essential characteristics and did backslide to authoritarian regime (Krasniqi, A, Hackaj, A, 2013). At some point, international intervention did play a crucial role as a guarantor and facilitator in extinguishing the political discrepancies and soothing the situation for conduction to new elections. Since the Albanian post-communist society totally lacked provision of democratic and liberal contents in the frame of political culture, it mainly connected the quality of democracy and democratization process directly with the strength of capitalism or market economy (Biberaj, 1998). This puts a "thorn" on the paradigm of transition in the Albanian case. It is worth noting that consolidation of democracy is not necessarily directly link to economic prosperity. But the Albanian episode,

challenges all possible theories and would encounter several troubling paradoxes in the context of these theories of political and economic transition (Krasniqi, A, Hackaj, A, 2013). This was a major downfall in the transition to democracy and market economy (Abrahams, C, Freed 2015).

### **Purpose and research method**

Here I try to analyze thoroughly the problem of transition and its clarification as a syndrome of the political elites' mis-conceptual and dysfunctional politics. The main argument is that analysis and criticism of the political and social situation of this prolonged transition are addressed toward the political class as the main actor to blame for such failure. A corrupted economy and a criminalized society with an compulsion to serve the ruling class only fit the individual or small group interest ( Pareto 1935). This failure left enough room for some political leaders to create the model of party single leadership, an element that distorted the effectiveness and democratic functionality of political parties, capture of institutions, which freedom and independence were guaranteed by the constitution, thus damaging the foundation of a democratic state (Mair, P. 1997). This created among the population an apathy toward the narrow-minded political class, and a deep climate of mistrust and indifference to political debate, since no one believed in the ruling class or political elites. The fear of the idea of chaos and tragic breakdown of the political and economic system experienced before, did put the society overall and the international aid in reflecting on the idea of preserving the political elites as long they remain loyal somehow to the path of democratization. This is an undeniable fact that the political class is the most important actor in policy-making and in Albania, unlike all former communist countries, historical political leaders are political very active and in competition to consolidate power besides many critics from the civic society and also academic sphere. The political arena has been practically controlled by the same political unchanging actors.

Therefore, analysis of the problem should be focuses on the role of elites and leaderships normative preference for democracy. The struggle between the different political actors could be examined by looking into the continuous cycle of harsh rhetoric that would regularly change the power balance and created tensions in political discourse. This could be as a variable for analyzing the detrimental role of political elites and their normative preference for democracy.

### **Analysis result**

The ruling elites, and political actors, have not changed the harsh rhetoric, fragmentation, autocratic tendencies of party leadership and political exclusion have characterized the ruling elites during all these years of transition. Seen from this optics, the exercise of power in an individual manner is a notable feature of the behavior of the political elite. Due to this influence and usurpation we have attained the dysfunction of institutions and administration, which, in principle, are considered as independent units. This unilateral exercise of power has always produced constant

clashes between the government and these institutions. The lack of a public opinion has created the possibility of abuse of power by the political class. The whole politics of this last decades have been loud, antagonistic, and accompanied by internal conflicts, as it has always been among political class leadership. It is led by the will of the leader to dominate over the rest of the group and who has different opinions from the leader, is hated and expelled, thus transforming political parties into formations controlled by an individual, who in order of personalizing political parties does everything to consolidate power.

During these 30 years of transition, the most important feature of the behavior of the political elite is the exercise of power in for personal gain. This is a feature, that continues to keep thriving its self and keep consolidation the use of the oppression in the exercise of power. This has produced always contested elections, controlled or marginalized institutions that could not function independently of party leadership politics. A real example of this is that, always, we have had a loud or violent winner in power, who has treated the political opponent as an enemy and not as a rival who has lost the electorate votes.

### **Leadership's Normative Preference for Democracy**

Under this assumption, the political leadership decisions and actions govern the political outcomes during the phase of transition. Without neglecting the structural approach and political culture influence, the intention here is to show that the leaderships normative preference for democracy in the case of Albania is a major and predominant contributor that directly influence the outcome of transition and therefore the quality of democratic content in this process or shifts in regime outcomes. It is imperative to state here that under the hypothetical assumption of the absence of the international influence and pressure opposed to the Albanian leadership, the latest would have completely jeopardized the transition process, due their authoritarian mentality and propensities. Implication of this deduction, contributes more on the choice of the political actors' normative commitment to democracy, as an independent variable associated with the regime survival or regime changes. The political leadership significance set of normative decisions toward the path of transition, are determinant and compliant to the breakthrough phase and have been crucial for the democratization of society. Lack of compliance and the non-democratic decisions complete by the political actors in the meantime from the period of state building process have resulted in a non-democratic status quo which has accompanied Albania, since the time of changes from past communist regime.

In Albania, from the time of state formation until today, the most important political actors have been more focused on their personal interests than common interests related to the democratization of the country. Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2013), specified that democracies may consolidate when political leadership develops solid democratic norms and moderate policy preferences, but they may withdraw if crucial actors go back on from democratic commitments in order to gain political advantages

for personal gain or short-term political solution of if they approach radical positions. Political actors with strong normative commitments to democracy could lose their role in political process if preferences for radical policy become viable and prevalent (Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán, 2013). Therefore, the political culture could sustain more gain in formation of the democratic preferences of the political leadership in order not to obscure its persistent to the democratic orientation. The intention here is to emphasize the role that the different political actors have in the democratic creation of the main structure of a democratic regime and commitment to consolidation process. Here I would like to introduce Schmidt's argument that helps notion that the political actor's will and emphasis to normative preference for democracy is important in speeding up of the development of democratization because in absence of it could possible fail to finalize (Schmidt, 2012, 446).

Under the frame of political conduct and analysis of political actor performance profile, Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán developed and assumed that the exhibition of any codes of to be fulfilled under the frame of preference for democracy. If any if those ten codes would fail to follow up or show certain ambiguity by the political actor, there are indicator of lacking background on the preference for democracy (Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán, 2013, 116-117).

## **Discussion**

Discussing these measures to define democratic standards, stating that they are important in order to determine whether Albania has finished the transition phase or not it is important also to see at the degree of democratic freedom and constitution. The commitment to democracy is a complex system and the theory of leadership preference for democracy has its limitations in explaining the Albanian case. Also, elitist theories could be helpful in order to give a sounder definition of the elites' normative perception of democratic consolidation. On paper, and from legal point of view, this process seems to have come to an end (Alexander, G. 2002). Transition could be in the brink of its final steps, as constitution, election and most of legislation is regulated to be conform and compact with EU legislation. But this, as mentioned above could not predict the radical preferences of key ruling elite outbreaking the political domain. If it is assumed that transition is over, the next logical question is: why did not Albania reach democratic consolidation? What are the new paradigms for democratic consolidation?

Also, Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan's theory of democratic consolidation could be another attempt to answer why Albania was not able to reach democratic consolidation. It will also contain the restrictions of democratic consolidation in Albania which appears to be in a continuous struggle with difficulty for democratization as there is a continuous cycle of abusive power use, the revival of authoritarianism, and yet revival of premises for consolidation of democracy. The theory could be able to identify the problems with the democratic consolidation process during decades of transition and give an answer to why the ruling political

elites collapse the system into a closed sequence of recycling itself and revert the process into authoritarianist tendencies. Also, Juan J. Linz & Alfred Stepan work has shown that it has already become self-evident in political science that economic society is a supporting condition for democratic consolidation. Also, in the elitist theories frame, it is assumed that when a society is not run by its best elite, it remains stuck in its development, also a society that fails to realize the institutional functioning and free elections and, through voting, to make the elite circulation. Another point of view is that if the elite is consumed on the political course it becomes obvious that it is not possible to lead anymore, therefore it is inappropriate to stay in government (Burnham, J. 1941). That would explain the extension and the criteria of the legitimacy of the ruling class, and how it controls society in terms of how political elites circulate, employing free election or by revolution. This needs to be explained in terms of how is the political class is related to the democratic system and its principles and how these elites are connected or represent the state interests (Pareto, 1935).

## **Conclusion**

Albania is an exceptional case study for exploring democratic consolidation that the country's history during the last decades consists of various government transitions from autocratic to democratic and yet losing the democratic quality and did not consolidate. The difficult transition period seems to be mainly chosen by the political class as a mean toward ends. The end goal of political elites evidently is to retain power as long as possible, considering the fact that the same elites have circulates the political sphere and transition path for more than 30 years, taken in account they many of them are extensions of the past totalitarian regime. This has reduced drastically civic trust in the political class and their legitimacy to rule. The employment of the up down model, pyramidal party control and the of and that of the rule of power in the circulation of the elite, made it possible for the functioning of the new political elite to begin the process of differentiation of the Albanian elite in the creation of an elite layer of professional politicians. The construction of the cult of the leader is a consequence of a political career not based in meritocracy. These phenomena shortened the incomings of the new elites in power, it diminished the model of meritocracy inside the party selection process of leadership and it reduced the civic society representation in political decisions. Establishing the model of power control and exercises of power did put Albanian democracy under the gray zone and according to Carothers, Th, (2002) is dominant-power politics state. Countries with this syndrome have limited but still real political space, political contestation by opposition groups, and at least most of the basic institutional forms of democracy (Carothers, 2002. P.11). Yet one political grouping, whether it is a movement, a party, an extended family, or a single leader that dominates the system in such a way that there appears to be little prospect of alternation of power in the foreseeable future (Carothers, 2002 p.12).

Latest, is recoded a milestone event in history of Albanian transition, Socialist Party wins the third consecutive election and for the first time in three decades a strong historical leader is declared non-grata from U.S department with motivation of significant corruption and tentative to impede democracy in Albania. On the other hand, Albania is consolidating a judiciary reform that is under the strict inspection of foreign influence. Economic endeavors, in areas of road infrastructure, airports, ports, renewable energy, agriculture and tourism, seem to have a promising future and could probably boost the economy. Important is to mentioned that the new elect parliament is compound mostly form distinguished professionals, new politicians and also people that have a voice in civic society. Strategic partners and E.U commissioners have admitted that Albania is ready to open negotiations for ascending in E.U membership. Successful management of the pandemic has increased the confidence in the internal resources of healthcare system management, and strengthen the collaboration with European Union. At a glance it seems that Albania ended transition and now is on new phase, that of post-transition. This has opened real debates among analysts and public opinion, whether the notions stand true for Albania. Without doubt, from the perspective of political theory analysis, the country is either a fleckless democracy or a dominant-power politics state that time after time puts a good show during elections in order to convince the international strategic partners of fair and good quality of elections, vis a vi-better democracy.

I have shown above in the analysis of this work that different approaches on theoretical ground could not give a sound conclusion to the Albanian case more than the leadership preference for democracy. Its about time to check in the future the role of the ruling party and its leadership if the preference is for democracy and works for the progress of society toward the so long desired trajectory of consolidation of democracy in Albania.

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