

Consequences of the Totalitarian past on the Albanian Post- Communist Society

Matilda Pajo

PhD. Cand., AAB College – Pristina, Kosovo

Abstract

Enver Hoxha's communist regime lasted 45 years, leaving unstudied long-term consequences in the Albanian society. Still today, after 26 years of transition, the path of democratization of Albania remains unclear. Albania has been for more than four decades under one of the most isolated communist regimes in Europe. The transition from a communist totalitarian state to a democratic state is still incomplete even after 26 years since the fall of communism. Annual reports carried out by Freedom House noted a delay in the processes of democratic governance in Albania. In these reports, since 2007, based on the democratic indicators, Albania is defined as a hybrid regime. The aim of this paper is to argue that one of the reasons delaying democratization is the missing detachment, or the non-separation from the mentality of communist past. The methodology of this paper is qualitative nature, based on the international philosophical and political science literature. Also the author has studied countries, who have had similar experiences of totalitarian regimes and who later embraced democracy. This paper attempts to explain, that the bad governance is linked to the anti-democratic character of governance in Albania. Throughout Eastern Europe, Albania was the most radical, on the adaptation of Stalinist totalitarianism type, and nevertheless still today, is not seeking punishment of crimes of communism and has not implemented a law on lustration. The past can become an obstacle to the future when is not studied, recognized and confronted with.

Keywords: Communism, Hybrid regime, Democratization, Transitional society

Introduction

Albania experienced for 45 years one of the most brutal totalitarian regimes that were seen in Europe. Also, it was the last country that overthrew the Stalinist totalitarian dictatorship type in Europe. Immediately after the fall of the totalitarian regime in the 90s, Albania began to open up to the world. Being isolated like no other European country and for a relatively long time, Albanian society and the simple Albanian individual practically lived on an island, isolated and without communication with the world, in a reality all of their own and with a worldview very different from the world that surrounded them. Therefore opening to the world meant first, dealing with another mentality, lifestyle, and presentation of concepts which are diametrically opposed to what Albanian people known until that moment. Secondly it meant putting in doubt, weakening and breaking the communist system of values, which were cultivated by the totalitarian system. With the establishment of political pluralism and democracy also began the new social, political and economic challenges for Albania.

This paper is based on one side on the qualitative methodology because addresses theoretical and philosophical concepts, sociological notions and interpretations and on the other hand is taken into consideration also the quantitative methodology with numerical reports, which are used measurements conducted by researchers , local and international as Freedom House, Transparency International, European Commission, Institute of Political Studies etc. The paper reflects interpretations on Albania's path from a totalitarian regime to a democratic one and offers its own explication on the 'delay' of the recent years towards a consolidated democracy. To achieve this, it is necessary to study not only the period of transition, but also the consequences that the Albanian society carried oppression during the totalitarian regime.

In 1944 "Partisans were advancing towards Tirana with the help of the British. In October they formed a provisional government with Hoxha as prime minister." (Abrahams, F. (2015), *The new Albania*). Elections were held in December 1945, Albania was proclaimed "People's Republic", and Enver Hoxha was appointed "prime minister, foreign minister, defense minister and chief commander of the army" (Ibid p33). Tribal and patriarchal organization of society helped cultivate

the image of Hoxha as father of the nation, "it was called 'The Leader', and many Albanians called him 'Uncle Enver' (Ibid p35). Sigmund Freud in his studies analyzes the role of the leader and the chairman of the crowd. According to Freud, the leader is a fierce father, who knows what is good and what is bad for each of his children (Freud, Z. (W.Y) Psychology of crowds). Albanian society organization was that of a closed society, where some of its features are found in the book of Karl Popper (Popper, K, (2012), *The Open Society and its enemies*), according to him a closed society is a tribal society where all are known to all, and have blood ties, and social relations are quite important. Such societies have features of enslaved societies.

History of Albania on the larger part is transition from one occupation to another and from one ruler to another, Romans, Slavs, Ottomans, Italians, and Germans etc. Even when Albania was ruled by Albanians as Ahmet Zogu and later Enver Hoxha Albanian society remained submissive. As the Albanian sociologist and philosopher, Artan Fuga explains: "The individual, perhaps after a period of several centuries, remains alone before its future. Without intermediaries", (Fuga, A, (2008), *Media, politics, society, 1990-2000*). For the first time, the Albanian individual would not have as social mediator another actor in relation to his future. The price of freedom, however, did not come without cost.

Today, more than 26 years Albania has not yet completed successfully its journey to consolidate democracy in the country. Low confidence of citizens in state institutions and the system in general, high levels of corruption and the crisis of representation of citizens are just some of the concerns raised in the public debate in recent years. Freedom House writes about developments in the years 1990- 1991: "Since the Second World War, Albania was the most isolated of Europe under Enver Hoxha's communist leadership. Freedom of expression was forbidden, religion was outlawed, and torture executions were common." (Period of democratic transition: 1990-1991'- Freedom House.org). Freedom House categorizes Albania as a partly free country, classification that follows since the establishment of political pluralism¹. In the division "Nations in Transit 2016" (the countries in transition 2016), Freedom House lists Albania as a country in transition / hybrid regime (Ibid).

In the book, *Media, Politics, Society, 1990-2000*, Artan Fuga writes that the study of the years 1990-2000 has national significance because we have an amount of events that should be studied as flooding systems and economic models, emigration, exodus, revision of values, social and psychological trauma, liberation of Kosovo etc. (Fuga, A, (2008), *Media, politics, society, 1990-2000*). So, the history of the Albanian transition is filled with rapid changes and these events need specific sociological, historical and political studies. The first decade after the collapse of the totalitarian system in Albania can be summarized under the name of: experimental decade. In Albania, as many of the countries in transition from dictatorship to democracy was applied the so-called 'transition paradigm' (Carothers,Th, (2002), *The end of transition paradigm, Journal of democracy* 13:1). During 1990-2000 took place major transformations in the economic, social and political sphere. After the conclusion of the communist stage, many Eastern European countries such as Albania began policies to open the market and to adjust the free economy, which would be based on private entrepreneurship. Albania and its political leaders strictly implemented neoliberal policies proposed by the International Monetary Fund and the situation seemed optimistic until the 1997's where pyramid schemes brought the country's financial collapse and Albania faced a Hobbesian situation, quasi civil war.

According to Nina Bandelj and Bogdan Rady (Bandelj N, Rady, B, (2006), *Consolidation of democracy in post- communist Europe*, Center for the study of democracy, University of California), most scholars who follow political developments in Central and Eastern Europe focus on the fall of communism and democratic transition, but should not be left out of attention the political developments of recent years. In the same paper the two researchers argue that some of the countries in transition are stuck in the gray area, which scholars and political experts refer to the phenomenon with different names as: semi-democracy, electoral democracy, democracy facade, pseudo democracy, poor democracy, partial democracy etc. (Ibid p 9-10). In view of Bandelj and Rady: "In the post-communist world, Moldova, Bosnia, Albania and Ukraine have some significant signs" (Ibid p 10-11) of feckless pluralism syndrome.

Societies like Albania, who have features of feckless pluralism (Ibid p 11-12), are described by a deep mistrust of the public to the governing elite, also political elites are seen as corrupted and that do not use their post for the general good, but on personal interest. They are ineffective in the eyes of society. Albanian government's performance is evaluated by the

Government effectiveness index which is measured by the World Bank, it was -0.07, so a negative value ('worldwide governance indicators'- worldbank.org). In a report (Public-opinion poll of confidence in the government '- idmalbania.org) published by the Institute for Democracy and Mediation on the faith (belief) of the citizens in the government confirmed this lack of belief. Highest trust Albanians have in international institutions such as NATO (74%) and EU (72%), while 1 in 3 citizens believes in government. Less trusted are judicial system (80%) and political parties (79%)¹. Over 50% of respondents do not have faith in public institutions ('Albania corruption rank'- Transparency international. org). One of the biggest challenges that Albania must confront is corruption in order to be part of the European Union. Recent measurements carried out by Transparency International, Albania ranks 88th with 36 points (Ibid) remaining in the ranking of most corrupt countries in the region, and not only.

During the communist regime, Albania had all the features of a totalitarian dictatorship, features summarized by the researchers Friedrich and Brzezinski, (Friedrich, C, Brzezinski, Z (1956), Totalitarian dictatorship and autocracy,) an official ideology, a single party of the masses led by the dictator, a control system and police terror, monopoly of technology in the hands of party, monopoly and control of weapons, and finally, the centralized economy. The consequences of a long totalitarian period are present still today. The target of the totalitarian regime was any spontaneous social. Observe that two of the characteristic features of a totalitarian system are still present today, 26 years later, for example still are not condemned the crimes of communism. The importance of the party and the role of the leader are still big in Albanian politics and society. The main parliamentary parties in Albania are governed by authoritarian methods and internal democracy is still weak, decisions are made vertically and the word of the leader is what concludes decisions. At the same time, the Albanian society accustomed to authoritarian leader, strict and charismatic, has been promoting this model, so all Albanian leaders after 1991 'suffer' the syndrome of protagonist, the figure of the party leader should not be overshadowed by any other figure within the party.

Moreover, the high level of unemployment, especially among young people, this brought the pursuing for finding a job and the involvement in party structures becomes a common choice. The communist regime party was "the prerogative" (Lefort, C, (2000), La complicazione: al fondo della questione comunista), even Lefort said that the party was transformed into fetish and as such it "invades the state apparatus and becomes founding conductor of the State that directs all social life" (Ibid p82). There is no other pole of truth and omniscience, "there is no legitimacy except the party" (Ibid p83). The party provided full employment for all citizens and Lefort writes that "faith in socialism is partly undivided from faith in parties" (Ibid). The party was the mechanism through which all the goals of the system were achieved. This mentality is still present in the Albanian society where the party is seen as a mechanism of employment and personal benefits, for a significant part of individuals. Unemployment is high, 33.2% among young people in 15-29 age group, and 12.5% in the 30- 64 age group. The data obtained from INSTAT ('Unemployment rate'- Instat), statistics showed that unemployment is higher among young people, a large part of graduates. The same observations are made from the 2015 progress report, the European Commission for Albania, writes: "The rate of employment and participation in the labor market remain low, and the informal economy is still an important provider of employment" ('Albania 2015 report'- European commission).

Thus, the party is perceived as an "octopus" whose tentacles extend to all state institutions trying to conduct them. Political parties in Albania are mainly parties organized by clientele that operate through exchanges and fulfillment of favors, using informal environment and pursuing undemocratic mentality. Parties are the best example of how the old mentality of past dictatorial system is present. Institute of Political Studies in a report (Internal democracy in political parties from March to May 2016'- ISP), carried on political parties, from March to May 2016 and stresses the idea that political parties are clientele parties and as such are not transparent in their operations, so "being a clientele party the main source is informality of decision- making and financing" (Ibid). Furthermore, "most parties do not declare their political functionalities, as a large part of the report concluded; they hold both statuses, political and civil, which is contrary to law" (Ibid)

In addition, accountability and transparency to the public and citizens is low, in public places or different media is articulated the opinion of the leader, the party leader, but is not reflected what activities, discussions or thoughts has the party itself with its members. We see at this phenomenon undoubtedly elements of dictatorship mentality, totalitarian party recognizes only thinking and discussion within party structures, criticism is valid only within the structures of the party, while outside this was excluded. Lefort writes that "no one should be subject to the discipline of action, but also think outside the party"

(Ibid 86). In the Albanian society 26 years later, what is discussed, decided and debated within the party remains unclear and hermetic. Citizens do not have the information and the decisions taken are closed nature without consulting the wider public, by remaining so faithful to the old idea that the party is criticized only internally (if is criticized).

According to the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), in a survey conducted with the Socialist Party congressmen's emerged the conclusion that political parties are not separate from the state "they love (state) power for power and employment" ('The main findings of the survey of ISPs in the Socialist Congress- ISP, politike.al). More than two and a half decades, transition in Albania is categorized from weak state institutions and strong leadership figures. Authoritarianism in Albanian leadership is also seen in the language and vocabulary used in public, the language is outrageous and harsh against political opponents, which often goes to insults, defamation and verbal threats, and they do it front of the cameras in the assembly hall. The political opponent as occurred in Enverist dictatorial system is the source of all the evils of society, whether during the totalitarian system elimination were physical totalitarian system during democracy become political eliminations. The harsh language, in most cases without political and civic ethics has the purpose of public denigration of any other political alternative, its humiliation and political causes, and simultaneously we see the glorification of its own political alternative. The dichotomous reality divided into good and bad, in black and white, communists and revisionists, patriots and traitors is another element of the totalitarian mentality that we see present today.

Democratic regimes are different from undemocratic regimes among other things by the degree of real participation of citizens in decision making processes and also the willingness to reach political consensus when is required for the good of the country. Albanian experience has shown that real civic participation in these processes is minimal and civic awareness is still low and with lacking of mobilization on issues that affect the public. Also, the Albanian citizen as an individual emerged from a totalitarian system has cultivated a highlighted indifference to issues of public and social problems. On the other hand, political consensus and agreements implemented since 1991-2016 have been difficult and always mediated by the international actors.

Naturally the question is: why are still so many present elements of undemocratic culture in Albania? The answer partly is that, in politics after 1991, a large part of the political names are part of the past and therefore they are fed up to an undemocratic culture formation. Secondly, Samuel Huntington writes that "the self-renewal of the democratic systems is realized through elections, new options and new promises" (Huntington, S, (2015), *The third wave of democracy*), this is a condition missing in Albanian politics because despite the change of the ruling power the country mentality and governance mechanisms are the same, it relies on the fact that the Albanian parliamentary parties are directed for years by the same figures, so inside the party itself has no substantial changes in order to be reflected on the socio-political developments, (Krasniqi, A, (2016), "This politics will last until leave the elite that came in 1990"- Javanews.al). Thirdly, the Albanian society for more than four decades was formed with an authoritarian culture, and consequently the obedience to the political leaders was naturally and will need a longer time to change this. The legitimacy of the Albanian democratic regime arose over anti-communist position, while all without exception belonged to the communist world. For this reason, the Albanian society today faces a crisis of political representation as simple citizen feels no represented by politics.

Why we face this situation? One answer would be that with the fall of the communist regime the Albanian society's suffered also declining values in society, with the opening up to democracy and free markets profile values of the Albanian individual turned towards materialist (or survival values), (Kocani, A, (2013), *Exploring the value system in Albania in the post-communist period*). However, properly Gene Sharp wrote: "No one should believe that with the fall of the dictatorship an ideal society will immediately appear" (Sharp, G. (2012), *From dictatorship to democracy*). Albanian society has to learn the price of freedom itself because "no external force will come to give to oppressed people the freedom they so much love. People should teach on its own how to get freedom. It's not easy" (Ibid, p91) To conclude, the journey of a state from the dictatorship to democracy is not easy, dictatorial system in Albania has fallen for several (26 years), but not the mentality of undemocratic political culture. Despite this, the greatest hope of Albania is the coming political elite and the young people who have grown up in freedom and know how to protect and maintain it.

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