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## ***Delayed Democracy: Albanians' Pathways to Post-Communism***

**Abstract:** *Albania experienced the harshest totalitarian regime in Europe for almost 45 years. The Communist regime in Albania was characterized by complete isolation from the rest of the world. The legacy of the past, which resulted in extreme poverty and the lack of a democratic culture, is the main factor inhibiting Albania's democratisation. The central focus of this article is to evaluate the role of the Socialist Party during the transition from Communism to a democratic system. Albanian democracy faces a number of persistent challenges, thus making Albania's post-Communist transition highly uncertain.*

**Keywords:** Albanian democracy; Democratic transition; Post-Communism.

### *1. Historical Background*

Albania is a small country located in the south-western part of the Balkan Peninsula, and extends in an area of 28.748 km<sup>2</sup>. The connection with Italy is by means of two seas: the Adriatic Sea and the Ionian Sea. Albania is the Medieval Latin name, while in the Albanian language it is called “Shqipëria”, which means “The Land of Eagles” since this bird was once widespread in that region and is shown with two heads on the coat of arms.

From the middle of the 15th century until 1912, Albania was part of the Ottoman Empire that ruled the Balkan Peninsula for about five hundred years. Albania's only experience of democracy was the short-lived government of Fan Noli,<sup>1</sup> which lasted just six months in 1929. During its independent political life, Albania was subject to monarchic rule under Zog, who proclaimed Albania a monarchy in 1928, thus becoming King Zog I of Albania.<sup>2</sup>

From 1944 to 1990, Albania experienced the authority of a single party, which proved one of the harshest, most repressive and introverted regimes of that period, compared to other countries in Eastern Europe. Albania

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<sup>1</sup> See H. SELEMANI, *Nga botimet e Zogut I, Mbretit të shqipëtarve*, Tirana, Kristalina-KH, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> See G. TRAGLIA, *L'Albania di re Zog*, Roma, Publisher Tibet, 1930.

adopted the Soviet system of centralised economic planning, with an emphasis on the rapid development of heavy industry. The Communist regime in Albania was characterized by complete isolation from the rest of the world. This isolation caused by Communism is the main reason that accounts for the lack of economic development of the Albanian state, so that its consequences are clearly visible even to date.

The “wind of change” that brought about the fall of Berlin wall and collapse of Communism in many Central and East European countries, swept through Albania as well. The fall of the Berlin wall in November 1989 led all Communist countries in Europe to a slow process of democratic change, including Albania.

Present-day Albania is a country that is desperately searching for well-being, pursued by the liberalism that has the appearance of a reaction to the absolute and central interventionism of previous decades. Over the last two decades, Albanian citizens lived through tremendous political and economic changes. Now Albania qualifies as a democracy, although that democracy needs to be consolidated further. Apart from demonstrating that democratisation has not yet completed, the present article aims to highlight what constitutes the legacy of the Communist period (1945-1991), and how this is discussed, valued and addressed in Albania today. The central focus of this article is to evaluate the role of the Socialist Party during the transition from Communism to a democratic system.

The chronology of political events, particularly the most recent ones, does not project a bright future for Albanian democracy.

## 2. *The Hoxhian Period*

Albanian Communists enjoyed a higher degree of legitimacy than their colleagues in other countries. From 1944 until 1991, Albania was ruled by the Albanian Party of Labour, led by Enver Hoxha until his death in 1985. He created the longest-lasting Stalinist regime in Europe. Hoxha’s regime proliferated into a fantastic system of paranoia, which justified repression on a massive scale.<sup>3</sup> The Albanian regime not only adhered to Stalinist methods of the purge, but pursued genuinely Stalinist goals of revolutionary internationalism, first on the side of Stalin, then as an ally of Mao’s China, and finally standing on its own as one of the last bastions of Communist

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<sup>3</sup> See E. BIBERAJ, *Albania in Transition: A Rocky Road to Democracy*, Denver, CO, Colorado Press, 1999, p. 22.

orthodoxy. Much like Stalin, Hoxha used nationalist slogans in his design to mobilize Albanian society for combat and, just as Stalin glorified Russia as an instrument of higher purposes, Hoxha viewed Albanians as instruments of the world revolution.<sup>4</sup>

The Communist Party dominated for decades with its omnipresent ideology and mechanisms of social control. According to the main features of a totalitarian regime, Albania went through a regime marked by propaganda against external forces and the elimination of all political opposition, intellectuals and dissidents. Indeed, with regard to domestic policy, Hoxha was inspired by Stalinist methods, destroying any kind of opposition.

There are many factors that allowed the affirmation of Communism in Albania: in the first place, the perennial ideal of safeguarding national independence, a faith shared by many Communist leaders and by a great deal of the population and mainly fuelled by the hermetic closure to any contribution/influence that came from outside and menaced its rigid Marxist-Leninist ideological framework, of which Hoxha was considered the only authorized interpreter.<sup>5</sup>

It is not surprising that the Communist government spent significant resources on jamming radio broadcasts, producing propaganda and enforcing strict border controls, total isolation from the rest of the world, the abolition of individual liberties, instrumental use of patriotism and nationalist rhetoric. The 1976 Constitution sanctioned the abolition of religious practices, thus making Albania the first self-proclaimed atheist state in the world, recognising 'no religion whatsoever' (Article 37 of the 1976 Constitution). In 1967 religion was banned and all houses of worship were either closed or demolished at once. The Party of Labour of Albania had always waged a systematic struggle against religion as a reactionary ideology, "*the opium of the people*". The Party considered the struggle against religion, against religious prejudices and backward customs directly or indirectly connected to religion, as indispensable for the social liberation of the working people, for the development and strengthening of the

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<sup>4</sup> See A.C. JANOS, *What Was Communism: A Retrospective in Comparative Analysis*, in «Communist and Post-Communist Studies», XXIX, 1, March 1996, pp. 1-24.

<sup>5</sup> See P. RAGO, *Focus su Albania. Il comunismo di Enver Hoxha, tradizione e nazionalismo*, in A. PISANÒ, a cura di, *Questioni geopolitiche mediterranee*, Napoli, ESI, 2011, p. 290.

socialist economy and culture, and for the revolutionary ideological tempering of the masses and building of a socialist society.<sup>6</sup>

By the mid-1980s, Albania was confronted with grave problems, which were reflected by a sharp economic decline, low productivity, pervasive shortages of basic foodstuffs, an ailing infrastructure and huge subsidies.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. *Communist Legacies*

There are many types of legacies, the first one being undoubtedly cultural. The past can affect the political values and behaviour in post-Communist countries like Albania. Therefore, addressing the impact of the enduring legacies of the Communist system is of paramount importance. Legacies are deeply-rooted, durable causes that affect the potential for democratic consolidation. For this reason, it is not yet entirely evident whether Albania is still in transition or in a process of democratic consolidation. The legacy of the past, which has resulted in extreme poverty and lack of a democratic culture, constitutes the main factor inhibiting Albania's democratisation.

Albania's internal problems are to a large extent remnants of the Communist legacy. Indeed, there are many problems: social (corruption, organised crime) and political (bitterly divided scene); weak state structures (especially the justice system); authoritarian tendencies among political parties. Nevertheless, their origins may also be traced back to earlier periods in Albania's history, for example during the Ottoman rule. Highland clan structures and low levels of urbanisation represent historical features that are still present in Albanian society. As time passes, these legacies should be gradually superseded by the more recent performance of post-Communist political institutions.

However, little has been said about the legacy of a weak or non-existent democratic experience and the complete concentration of power during Communism. This lack of democratic tradition and economic backwardness, ranking Albania as one of the lowest per capita income countries in Europe, has plunged Albania into the vicious circle of negative feedback between economy and politics. The economic issues of the transition have been overridden by the impact of the legacies of the

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<sup>6</sup> See *History of the Party of Labor of Albania*, in *The Institute of Marxist-Leninist Studies at the Central Committee of the Party of Labor of Albania*, Tirana, The Naim Frasherri Publishing House, 1971.

<sup>7</sup> See BIBERAJ, *Albania in Transition*, cit., p. 23.

Communist system. Yet another legacy of Communism is the lack of a functioning system of checks and balances designed to limit abuse of power. The new political elite, although claiming to fight against Communist legacies, was deeply rooted in its Communist past. Furthermore, lack of experience of any effective state administration highlights incompetence in establishing new effective and efficient structures.

At the primary stage of the post-Communist history, all ex-Communist countries may relate to a serious lack of local knowledge and resources for modelling and financing the construction of the necessary institutional frameworks for the introduction and operation of a multi-party democracy and market economy. The 40-year-long period of intensive Communist institutional, educational and ideological ‘re-building’, as well as the use of extremely inefficient non-market mechanisms of economic coordination, similarly affected the individual (in)capacity of all East European countries undergoing the process of post-Communist democratisation and economic ‘marketisation’.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4. *Introduction to Albanian Transition*

The student protests of 1990-1992 triggered a chain of events that brought about the fall of Communism and finally allowed Albania to open itself up to the free market system. The year 1990 saw the introduction of liberalisation measures both in politics and the economy, with concessions in the areas of religious freedom, justice and the possibility of expatriation, with the acceptance, towards the end of the year, of the principles of multi-parties, free elections and private property, with consequent changes to the Constitution.<sup>9</sup>

However, the success of transition depends above all on the rapid creation of institutional, legal, microeconomic and macroeconomic conditions conducive to the development and growth of a new private sector, both domestic and foreign.<sup>10</sup> Overcoming the form of a socialist state involves

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<sup>8</sup> See A. AGH, *Processes of Democratization in the East Central European and Balkan States: Sovereignty-Related Conflicts in the Context of Europeanization*, in «Communist and Post-Communist Studies», XXXII, 3, September 1999, pp. 263–279.

<sup>9</sup> See M. GANINO, *La Costituzione albanese del 1998: alla ricerca dell'Europa*, Torino, Giappichelli, 1999, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> See M. LAVIGNE, *Ten Years of Transition: A Review Article*, in «Communist and Post-Communist Studies», XXXIII, 4, December 2000, pp. 475–483.

the abolition of the role of the Communist party as the sole or dominant party, and the introduction of a multi-party system with political opposition; the abolition of the principle of unity of power and democratic centralism, and the introduction of separation of powers; the separation between party and state, and the elimination of party militias; the introduction of a system of rights, including economic ones, with an urgent appeal to market freedom and the recognition of private property; the overcoming of the socialist legal system and all its corollaries, and the insistent reference to the principles of the rule of law.<sup>11</sup> It was the dissolution of the Soviet Union that put an end to that conception of power that had evaded democratisation. In fact, the collapse of Communist regimes paved the way for democratisation and modernisation of political systems and constitutional structures.

The transition period for Albania has been a rough and prolonged one. After the collapse of Communism, Albanians lived through a period of profound transformations in general. However, Albania started its transition to democratic rule with a large number of challenges, not least because of its heavy Communist legacy. In this regard, it is clear that Albania was the last country of the Communist Bloc in Europe to embark on the road of transition from a totalitarian regime to democracy. Albanians emerged from Communism ill-prepared for the painful transition to a market economy. The abrupt dismantling of the Communist social welfare system, combined with the soaring rate of unemployment, left many citizens in a precarious position. Moreover, the population in general, as well as the emerging political and economic elites, were initially unfamiliar with the workings of a market economy.<sup>12</sup> As a result of the collapse of the socialist regime and the ensuing chaos, the form of state was challenged. For this reason, even in this late period of transition from Communism, the weakness of the new democratic institutions is still evident in Albanian politics.

The rise of a free market economy and the introduction of privatisation have had different effects on the economies of Eastern Europe. With regard to Albania, although all of the countries are plagued with some problems connected with economic reform, in Albania the hardest hit, in terms of real GDP, inflation, and unemployment, represents an unresolved problem.

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<sup>11</sup> See G. DE VERGOTTINI, *Le transizioni costituzionali*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2002, p. 177.

<sup>12</sup> See BIBERAJ, *Albania in Transition*, cit., p. 30.

### 5. *Building Democracy*

Democratisation is a complex process that does not end with the creation of democratic institutions; the phase of consolidation and sustainability of the institutions from liberal democracy is more relevant. The mode of transition not only affects the consolidation of new regimes but also helps determine whether the transition is to democracy or to some other regime type. Different modes of transition are likely to have distinct consequences for a country's politics. The mode of transition has influences upon the pattern of elite competition and the institutional rules created during the transition.

Despite the fact that the progress of the nation-building process presupposes and necessitates the acceptance of consensual democracy, the principal challenges to the consolidation of this democracy in Albania are weak compliance with the law, and poor governance. The aim of this work is to study how, in a society such as Albania, plagued with many problems, for example chronic poverty, under-development and corruption, Albania has arrived at a democratic system and whether this is "true democracy".

The assertion that the mere presence of democratic mechanisms does not in itself guarantee a correct functioning of democracy, demands evidence and explanation. Many post-Communist European states, Albania included, still struggle for the implementation of transitional reforms and merely hope for a better future. To meet the requirements of democracy, constitutional rights must be effectively available to the public. Promising democratic rights in writing, in law, or even in a constitution is not enough. The effective implementation of the new democratic constitutions requires not only complex transformations, including the constitutional structure, but also changes in the economic, social and political field. Democratic rights must be effectively applied and useful to citizens in practice. If they are not, the political system is not democratic, despite whatever claims the rulers make.<sup>13</sup>

After the Second World War, Albania abandoned the western system of constitutional organisation with the frame of reference being socialist constitutional law modelled on the Soviet-system.<sup>14</sup> In Eastern Europe, and

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<sup>13</sup> See R.A. DAHL, *Sulla democrazia*, Bari, Laterza, 2000, p. 53.

<sup>14</sup> See L. OMARI – A. ANASTASI, *E drejta kushtetuese*, Tirana, ABC, 2010.

the Balkans in particular, constitutionalism<sup>15</sup> was not customary before the coming of the socialist regimes. Therefore, for post-Communist East European countries it is totally inappropriate and scientifically unacceptable to present the introduction of constitutions based on liberal principles as a “return to Europe”.<sup>16</sup> Central and Eastern Europe was freed definitively from the Soviet yoke between 1989 and 1990, and this has resulted in the elimination of adjectives such as “socialist” and “popular” that had characterised the noun “Republic” in the constitutions of the States of Central and Eastern Europe. Indeed, it was provided to delete the hallmarks of Communist power and to replace the legislative assemblies linked to the former regime. Once one goes beyond the difficult stage of the constitutional consolidation, one arrives at the most difficult stage, i.e., the consolidation of democracy itself. The challenge for the consolidation of democracy lies in controlling the correspondence between constitutional data and the effectiveness of the principles codified therein. Therefore, whereas constitutionally-guaranteed freedoms in many countries appeared for the first time after 1989 (1989 is taken as the base year for the analysis of the current state of constitutional arrangements), in Albania they appeared only in 1998. The last Constitution of the Republic of Albania approved on October 21, 1998 seems an ambitious project. According to a number of scholars of democracy, many of the countries that have democratised under the auspices of the so-called third wave of democratisation are only hybrid regimes.<sup>17</sup>

A democracy can be defined as substantial if the political, social and institutional system is characterized by a number of essential elements: first of all, a constitution that is able to limit the powers, in a negative or positive sense; a government that is able to enforce human rights, both at public and private levels; a guaranteed multi-party system; a plurality of the media – being neither directly nor indirectly controlled by the government; a state that is not subject to direct control by the government and the ruling party; a

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<sup>15</sup> See P. BISCARETTI DI RUFFIA, *1988-1990. Un triennio di profonde trasformazioni costituzionali: in Occidente, nell'URSS e negli Stati socialisti dell'Est europeo*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1991.

<sup>16</sup> See G. De VERGOTTINI, *Costituzionalismo europeo e transizioni democratiche*, in M. CALAMO SPECCHIA – M. CARLI – G. DI PLINIO – R. TONIATTI, eds., *I Balcani occidentali, le costituzioni della transizione*, Torino, Giappichelli, 2008, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> See S.P. HUNTINGTON, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman, OK and London, University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.



multi-cultural civil society – active and involved in public life, and in which there is a fair degree of association.

In democratisation theory there are already standard criteria whereby progress in a given country may be measured. Dankwart Rustow distinguishes three consecutive stages of systemic change: 1) pre-transition crisis with a breakthrough towards democratisation; 2) democratic transition with the elements of both systems, old and new; 3) democratic consolidation as an emergence of the new system in a coherent way.<sup>18</sup> According to Attila Agh, some Balkan states are still in the stage of the pre-transition crisis since democratisation has hardly begun in Serbia, Bosnia and Albania.

In the Western Balkans, democratic transformation has not been an easy process. The EU has been playing a key role in this process in the belief that the prospect of EU membership would prevent the possibility of the region falling back into violence. However, governments in the Balkan states introduced serious transition reforms with a significant delay in comparison to their post-Communist counterparts from East Central Europe and the Baltic. Although some of the reasons for the delay of the Balkan countries to use the opportunity to link transition reforms to the process of EU accession could be found in sometimes confusing and dissonant policies and signals coming from the EU and its member states, much more important reasons are related to the internal political and socio-economic developments in these countries. The Balkan States were able to start progress on these “two fronts” only after the real reformers and “pro-Europeans” placed their illiberal post-Communist political leaders and governments recruited mostly from the members of the ex-Communist nomenclature.

## 6. *Progress in Euro-Atlantic Integration*

Albania's democratisation was closely linked to its integration within the European Union; however, EU leverage has not been the single factor for change. It should be noted that Albanian society strongly approves of EU involvement in the internal affairs of the country, although EU accession presupposes serious limits of sovereignty, since the EU has common institutions and decision-making mechanisms. According to Attila Agh, the

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<sup>18</sup> See D.A. RUSTOW, *Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model*, in «Comparative Politics», II, 3, April 1970, pp. 337-363.

two stages of systemic change or democratisation have been closely connected with those of European integration. Democratic transition has coincided with the association to the EU – and not only chronologically. There is a deeper connection between these factors as being two sides of the same coin.<sup>19</sup> With reference to the European integration process, Albanian scholars, such as Odeta Barbullushi, believe that Europeanisation has been transformed into a dominant question in Albania. In fact, this Europeanisation includes the EU-integration process and the European democratic process of transformation of both the political and national identity of the prospective candidate(s).

The building of a democratic election is a pivotal point for the process of integration and, as far as this is concerned, the two major political parties, Democratic and Socialist, are in agreement. Nevertheless, the lack of full convergence and consensus among political and social forces may yet undermine the consolidation of democratic institutions.<sup>20</sup>

Many steps need to be taken, including state-building and good governance based on the rule of law, human rights, civil liberties, free-market economy, pluralistic democracy and socio-cultural changes. Both right- and left- wing parties consider accession as the strategic goal of Albania's foreign policy and Euro-sceptic political groups are of marginal importance. The most significant challenge for Albania on its road to the EU is to overcome the legacy of one of the most repressive Communist dictatorships in Europe, whose dominant attributes are still poverty, an outdated economy, weak state structures, highly organised crime, corruption and fierce inter-party rivalry resulting from an under-developed political culture.<sup>21</sup>

The establishment of a democratic state of law, the fight against corruption and organised crime, reform of the justice system and conduct of free elections in Albania are the most important challenges for the continuation of this process of European integration. In the short term, the issue of elections is crucial, as it is the fundamental condition for Albania to

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<sup>19</sup> See AGH, *Processes of democratization in the East Central European and Balkan States*, cit., p. 276.

<sup>20</sup> See O. BARBULLUSHI, *Kështu Foli Europa! Përdorimi i Integritit European në Shqipëri*, in <http://revistapolis.com/polis/index.php/-polis-4-nderkombetaret-dhe-demokratizimi-othermenu-41>.

<sup>21</sup> See J. MUS, *The Western Balkans and the European Integration: Perspectives and Implications*, Publisher Office of the Committee for European Integration Department of Analyses and Strategies Centre of Eastern Studies Central European Desk, 2008.

receive the status of EU candidate country.<sup>22</sup> In the long term, the success of the integration process will depend on continued EU involvement in Albanian affairs, as the country alone is incapable of carrying out the reforms required by Brussels.

The EU has always supported and will strongly support and assist the Albanian government in putting through reforms, not just to help achieve the goal of EU membership, but also because they are central to the long-term health of Albanian democracy. According to the European Commission, in November 2011 the ruling majority and the opposition in Albania reached a political agreement which marked the end of the political stalemate stemming from the 2009 parliamentary elections. This agreement established a plan and timetable for carrying out electoral reform, improving parliamentary rules of procedure, and adopting all pending laws requiring a reinforced majority.<sup>23</sup>

In 2008, Albania was formally invited to join NATO, and on April 1st, 2009, it became an official member of the Alliance. Achieving NATO membership was the most important foreign-policy event in post-Communist Albania. Yet Albania continues to make little progress toward full integration, and needs constant and direct pressure from the West to achieve progress.

### *7. Some Characteristics of the Albanian Political Parties*

This is not an exhaustive list of the characteristics of the Albanian political parties; it is rather an attempt designed to highlight a few features of the two main political parties, which are the main protagonists in the country's political life: the Socialist Party (SP) and the Democratic Party (DP).

Despite the fact that the old one-party regime has broken down, and democratic institutions have finally taken its place, democratisation has not proceeded at the same pace across all regions or spheres of government. While the Albanian Communist elites were unable to impose their conditions on the transition, the lingering power of the old elites has had a moderating effect in the democratic system. Yet, the main problem with the

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<sup>22</sup> See C. RRUPLLI, *La Commissione europea boccia la candidatura dell'Albania all'UE*, in <http://www.albanianews.it/notizie/europe/item/1473-commissione-boccia-albania>.

<sup>23</sup> *Albania 2012 Progress Report*, in [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2012/package/al\\_rapport\\_2012\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2012/package/al_rapport_2012_en.pdf).

Albanian political parties remains their deeply-rooted perception of the party-state concept, a Communist legacy.

According to many scholars of democratic transition, the fully-fledged success of democratisation from authoritarian rule depends heavily on the promotion of political moderation within the principal political parties. With their substantial organisational resources and political appeal in the face of current social and economic difficulties, the former Communist parties will play an important role in influencing the scope and development of politics in the new democracies of Eastern Europe. The eminent transformation of these Communist parties into political organisations willing to play by the rules of the new democratic order will thus make them a key ingredient in the successful democratisation.<sup>24</sup>

After the fall of Communism across Eastern Europe, the former Communist parties changed their names, their symbols, their core ideologies, and their programmatic appeals. The new parties started espousing liberal ideas. With regard to Albania, this is best illustrated by the history of the Socialist Party of Albania and Democratic Party of Albania.

Founded in 1941 as the Albanian Communist Party, and renamed Party of Labour of Albania in 1948, the Socialist Party of Albania adopted its present name in 1991. It now rejects Marxism-Leninism and claims commitment to democratic socialism and a market economy. Indeed, during the Tenth Congress of the Albanian Labour Party in June 1991, that former Labour Party changed its name to the Socialist Party of Albania; it also changed its ideology from Communism to social democracy. In this way, the Socialist Party broke away with its past and compromised its ideology in order to remain politically competitive, although its membership and leadership came from the Communist political bureau.

Initially the Socialist Party shared power with the Democratic Party. However, despite its efforts to foster a new image, the Socialist Party could not convince the public that it represented the model of a successful ex-Communist party. The creation of a Communist Party of Albania in September 1991 and the beginning of the court process against old “Enverian grade” representatives, including Nexhmije Hoxha,<sup>25</sup> in January 1992, failed to persuade the public opinion that there was no connection

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<sup>24</sup> See J.T. ISHIYAMA, *Communist Parties in Transition: Structures, Leaders, and Processes of Democratization in Eastern Europe*, in «Comparative Politics», XXVII, 2, January 1995, pp. 147-166.

<sup>25</sup> Nexhmije Hoxha is the widow of Albanian Communist leader Enver Hoxha.

between the Socialist Party and former Albanian Labour Party.<sup>26</sup> The former Communists who were regenerated under a new organisation, the Socialist Party, were widely perceived as close collaborators of the *old order*, and the Democratic Party consciously excluded the Socialist Party from the reform process, regarding it as an extension of the Labour Party and its Communist predecessors.

Therefore, between 1991 and 1997 the Socialist Party went into opposition. Following the 1997 parliamentary elections, the Socialist Party returned to power and governed until 2005. In the meantime, it was divided between the old-guard factions of the former Communists and the reformist social-democratic members who have little connection with the Party's Communist heritage. The splitting of the left-wing vote and allegations of corruption were some of the reasons that account for the loss of the Socialist Party in the July 2005 elections. It only won 42 seats and is now in opposition.

With regard to the Democratic Party of Albania, the creation of that Party in December 1990, the first anti-Communist party, somehow marked the end of the 45-year era of Communist rule and the establishment of a multi-party democracy in Albania. However, the victory of the anti-Communist Democratic Party of Albania in the 1992 election did not strengthen the newly-founded democratic institutions in the country. Instead, the Communist practice of the wide misuse of government structures and legal institutions by a ruling political party continued.<sup>27</sup> If one looks closely at the new rulers, one will see, in particular, that they try to strengthen their grip on power, and marginalise the former regime. Indeed, Sali Berisha, the leader of the Democratic Party, had been the secretary of the former Labour Party for the Medical School of the University of Tirana. He became the first post-Communist democratic leader in Albania, yet some evidence shows that he continued in the tradition of authoritarian leadership. Under the banner of the war against Communism, the ruling Democratic Party began to restrict some of the key civil liberties of its opponents.

Intense developments followed the first pluralist elections that were held on March 31st, 1991, when the newly formed Communist government (the Party of Labour of Albania) was forced to resign, due to its failure to

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<sup>26</sup> See N. SMIRNOVA, *Historia e Shqipërisë përgjatë shekullit XX*, Tirane, Ideart, 2004, p. 440.

<sup>27</sup> See P. MILENKO, *The Role of Geography and History in Determining the Slower Progress of Post-Communist Transition in the Balkans*, in «Communist and Post-Communist Studies», XLI, 2, June 2008, pp. 123-145.

manage the hard economic situation effectively, and a new coalition government was formed, following an agreement between Albanian political parties. However, if we examine the background and the significance of the first pluralist elections, we will find that they failed to make a break with the Communist past. The wind of popular unrest led to the inevitable fall of the government in June 1991 and, following the formation of a coalition cabinet for the preparation of new elections, the March 1992 elections culminated in the victory of the Democratic Party.

Until now the elections have often been conducted in conditions that have rarely allowed a genuine expression of voters' preferences. The two main political parties, the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party, have not discharged their electoral duties in a responsible manner, a factor which has adversely affected the administration of the election process, and undermined public confidence in elections. This has been apparent in the use of the Central Election Commission as a political battleground between the parties. Polarised relations between the main parties made the consensus on the shape of the reforms hard to achieve.

At present, Albania is politically paralysed by a stand-off between the centre-right government of the Prime Minister Sali Berisha and the socialist opposition led by Edi Rama. This stalemate began in 2009, when the centre-right Democratic Party won the election, defeating the Socialists. However, the Socialist opposition refused to take up their seats in the Parliament, thus making Albania the only country in Europe without a formal relationship between the government and the opposition.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, Albania's underlying political disputes are not based on party ideologies or programs, as the two major formations largely share the same goals. The political notions of left, centre and right are, programmatically speaking, almost meaningless.<sup>29</sup>

### *8. Proposals for the future*

Albanian democracy faces a number of persistent challenges, making Albania's post-Communist transition highly uncertain. Albania continues to make progress in strengthening its democratic institutions and the rule of

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<sup>28</sup> See D. BECHEV, *The Protracted Death of Democratic Albania*, in [http://ecfr.eu/content/entry/commentary\\_the\\_protracted\\_death\\_of\\_democratic\\_albania](http://ecfr.eu/content/entry/commentary_the_protracted_death_of_democratic_albania).

<sup>29</sup> See *Local Elections and Political Instability in Albania*, June 1, 2011, Briefing of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

law, but this is not enough. What is missing for the transformation to be complete is a set of institutions, among which a modern welfare system is singled out. The rule of law is likely to be a very difficult criterion to achieve in this situation.

In the initial years of transition, the emphasis of economic policy was especially on macro-economic objectives, including price and trade liberalisation, and limiting budget deficits. However, the road to a market economy would be strewn with *land-mines* in the form of the cumulative political, economic and social legacies of Hoxha's Communist dictatorship.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, with very few exceptions, the present economic strategies do not seem to be able to create sufficient economic growth.

Reform and political and economic development are hampered by a number of lingering and serious ongoing problems, which are likely to place considerable obstacles in the path of establishing true democracy. There remains the critical problem of collusion between private and government interests. Albania's judicial institutions continue to suffer from political interference and financial instability. Despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression, the media are habitually considered to be politically partisan, and journalists remain subject to lawsuits, intimidation and physical attacks. Structural transformation is still incomplete.

Albania's human rights record has made steady progress over the past few years and is meeting general European standards more closely. However, the Roma community, for example, continues to suffer from societal discrimination. Corruption and organised crime are widespread in the Albanian society. These are generally considered to be a formidable obstacle to the effective functioning of democracy. According to international watchdog Freedom House's 2012 Report,<sup>31</sup> corruption remained deeply entrenched in all sectors of life in Albania, negatively affecting the country's economic and political development, as well as the consolidation of democratic institutions. While some efforts to combat low and mid-level corruption have been successful, high-level corruption remains largely untouched.

In short, the weakness of state institutions illustrates the lack of the rule of law and effective governance. Albania ought to focus mainly on implementation of reforms within state institutions, not on new laws or

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<sup>30</sup> See E. BIBERAJ, *Albania in Transition*, cit., p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> See *Freedom House's 2012 Report*, in <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/albania>.

institutions, improving administrative procedures and government efficiency and improving the standard of living of population.

Within politics, Albania's major problem is the sharp division between the right and post-Communist left, along with the authoritarian tendencies of its politicians. A lack of agreement between major political forces on crucial reforms has frequently paralysed politics in the country, and delayed progress towards this goal. From an ideological point of view, the Albanian political system is considered to be a state of law. In many ways and in different areas, this is really true – no doubt about it. However, if you look at many of its institutions, you will find that institutional relationships are not ruled by the legal aspect specifically, as this aspect of the “rule of law”, in fact, is based on another, deeper substrate, that is, the balance between the parties.<sup>32</sup>

Democracy was simply understood as a transition to a democratic society and complete destruction of the old Communist infrastructure. The authoritarian tendencies of the government during the early transition to democracy, the polarised political environment, lack of cooperation, consultation and agreement on the main reforms, the tendency to identify the state with the party in power, all these have served to make a complicated process even more difficult.

One question remains: is the glass half-empty or it is half-full? In short, is Albanian democracy half-successful or half a failure? Put in these terms, the discussion is inevitably sterile. Hence, in order for the Albania's political system to be democratic, it should not be the reserve of a few; rather, it must be the domain of all. The Albanian public can not defer to the political establishment by giving in to apathy and resentment.

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<sup>32</sup> See A. FIGA, *Norma evropiane dhe opinionioni lokal: mangësitë e përjasjes institucionaliste*, in «Revista Polis.Com», in [http://revistapolis.com/polis/index.php/polis-2—drejt-njurodyshimi-othersmenu-50/43-norma-evropiane-dhe-opinionioni-lokal-manget-pasjes-institucionaliste\\_](http://revistapolis.com/polis/index.php/polis-2—drejt-njurodyshimi-othersmenu-50/43-norma-evropiane-dhe-opinionioni-lokal-manget-pasjes-institucionaliste_)