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*Party system and social cleavages:
the case of the post-communist
Albanian elections*

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Abstract

The article analyses in a comparative and qualitative prospective the Albanian party system in the twenty years of post-communist transition. It intends to give a detailed panorama and trace the process of Albanian electoral systems, and hence induce stability and democratization path dependencies in the light of the historically recognized social cleavages.

Keywords

Albania, party system, social cleavage, electoral systems, European Union, stability

1 Introduction

This paper will try to contribute to the debate on party system and its implications on the democratic consolidation in South-Eastern Europe by making a deep analysis of the Albanian case. Choosing to investigate Albania is due to two main reasons. Firstly, because comparative works done on Eastern Europe usually leave Albania out or just marginally mention it as a particular case giving only limited analyses. And secondly, because little is said on parties and party system in Albania were most of the research tackles this issue superficially and in more general terms. By addressing directly the issue of parties and party system in Albania I intent to analyse comparatively national elections of the post-communist period in Albania and deduce some conclusions which might be useful and give hints for further empirical researches.

The main objective of the paper is to examine the cause-effect relationships between social cleavages in the Albanian party system, electoral systems and internal political stability. The main object of the analyses will be the 2005 and 2009 primary elections.

The two preliminary hypotheses laid down here are:

- H 1: the shift from mixed proportional to regional proportional electoral system in Albania deepens the historical social cleavages;
- H 2: the more the shift from mixed proportional to regional proportional electoral system in Albania, the more it creates post-electoral

political destabilization.

In this sense, I will try to evidence that, in the aftermath of the 2005 elections, in an electoral system which favoured alliances and mechanisms of reward of small parties, the political stability (non the less of the existence of some not-really democratic electoral mechanisms) was far more sustainable than in the aftermath of the 2009 elections, where the two main parties modified the electoral code embedded in the Constitution in order to sweep away the multi-party system in Albania.

In this sense, this article will lay out its arguments into five main parts. The very first part will regard a short introduction of the theoretical background of the concepts of democracy and democratic consolidation. Secondly, my further point will be a short snapshot of the historical background of Albanian political parties so to sketch an idea of what may be argued as a continuity or path dependency element on the today Albanian political system. In the third section, the question of Albanian political reality will be examined both from the perspective of political sociology, using Lipset-Rokkan model of cleavage alignments and that of political institutionalism, more inclined to the primacy of institutions and political competition. Fourthly, an overview of all the national Albanian elections will be operated, along with the description of the electoral systems to them combined, with a special focus on the 2005 and 2009 elections. Finally, I will test my hypotheses and draw some conclusions on the relationship between electoral systems and political stability and democratization in Albania.

2 Theoretical background

Defining democracy can entail some level of imprecision, because it is both a normative and an analytical concept. Literally, democracy originates from the Greek word *dimokratia*, which can be translated as ‘power of the people’, or the ‘power belongs to the people’. However, this definition does not provide a useful analytical account for assessing the democratisation process in Albania. Defining democracy, as Sartori points out, is a twofold problem in that it requires both a descriptive and prescriptive definition (Sartori, 1987: 8). He further argues that the democratic ideals do not define the democratic reality and vice versa a real democracy is not, and cannot be, the same as an ideal one. For Schumpeter democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who rule them (Nagle et al. 1999: 9). Because of this diversity of possible definitions

conceptual confusion and misinterpretations of the notion of democracy are easily created. This paper defines democracy as a political system in which the leaders of the government are chosen within regular intervals through elections based on a comprehensive adult franchise with equally weighted voting, multiple candidacies, secret balloting, and other procedures, such as freedom of the press and assembly that ensure real opportunities for electoral competition. (Dawisha et al.1997: 4)

Among the various hallmarks of democracy, competitive elections are the feature most easily identifiable and most widely recognized around the world. Moreover, competitive elections are a precondition alongside other political benefits that a democratic system may confer on its citizens, such as a healthy and well developed civil society, pluralist distribution of economic and social power in society (Dawisha et al.1997: 4).

Having defined democracy, it is important to identify the steps of democratisation. The democratisation process is the whole process of regime change from authoritarian rule to the rooting of a new liberal democracy (Pridham, 2000:16). Democratisation is achieved once consolidation is completed. It is important to mention here that consolidation is not a linear process. Unforeseen events may prevent or delay progress leading democratisation to fail or to be reversed.

The stress today is put on the on-going debate and interaction between three schools or thoughts of understanding parties and party system: that of *political sociology* seeking to explain political phenomena primarily by reference to social structure and its within divisions; that of *political institutionalism* more inclined to the primacy of institutions for mediating political struggles; and that of *Political competition* applicable to liberal democratic regimes where parties respond to the demand of competing with other parties reflecting the logic of competitive (and co-operative) interaction. (Ware Alan:1996) Although when coming to analyses and explanations of how parties and party system works it is more of a synthesis of the above mentioned factors that needs to be observed in the context of a specific country.

So how much do these theories explain Albanian political reality?

The Theories of Social Cleavages developed during 1960s by Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, put their emphasis on the social identities as the basic building blocks of party support in Western Europe (Norris Pippa: 2003). These social divisions are based on the historical experiences of Western countries and include the regional cleavages of centre-periphery, the class inequalities of workers-owners, and sectarian cleavages over church and state. Answers to these question will be analysed in para-

graph 4.

3 Historical background of Albanian party system

3.1 *Party development in pre-communist Albania*

The collapse of communism all around Eastern Europe and particularly the Albanian Students Protests gave birth to a multi-party system in Albania. The establishment of political pluralism set great expectations to the whole population for a very simple reason. Pluralism, the instigator of democracy, was seen as the only alternative to cure what Albania was suffering for almost 50 years. It made people believe that the diversity of parties will express the interests and aspirations of Albanians, but which later on prove not to be the case. This is partially because a stable party system capable of sustaining new democratic system was conditional on the limited experience of liberal democracy and relative weakness of the party development before the onset of the communist rule. In this context Albania's first political groups, forces and parties in the western sense of the word emerged only after World War I. They were rather evanescent gatherings centred on prominent persons who created temporary alliances to achieve their personal aims, or in the best case they were orientated toward ensuring the national sovereignty, independence and recovering lost territories having less clear programs on the internal organization of the Albanian polity. (Biberaj Elez: 1999)

The Progressive Party, the major conservative one, was composed of clan chiefs and well-known landholders. Its main platform was the firm opposition to any agricultural reform program that would transfer their lands to the peasantry. Fan Stilian Noli and other Western-oriented leaders formed the Opposition Party of Democrats aiming at abolishing feudalism, resisting Italian domination, and establishing a Western-style constitutional government. During 1920-1930 small communist groups were appearing in the major cities but it was only in 1941, with direct assistance of Yugoslav Communist, when the Albanian Communist Party was established. It soon became the best organized and most influential of all the Albanian parties created during the war. It gained significant popular support because of their emphases on the national liberation character. Favoured by this fact, they manage to overpower their weaker and poorly organized opponents grouped around the Legality Movement, which advocated King Zogu's re-

turn, and the National Front, which favoured the establishment of a democratic republic. After forming a provisional government in November 1944, the communist moved quickly to extend and consolidate their power throughout the country. They established a one-party system excluding so the possibility of participation and/or a coalition with other parties and groups. This one-party system had been preserved till 1991 when the political pluralism and multiparty system was established in Albania.

3.2 *Party development in post-communist Albania*

When parties came into existence, after pluralism emerged in the country, Albania lacked any tradition of party formation. The former communist ruling party abandoned the previous ideology and reconstructed itself as reformed Socialist Party. The Democratic Party, a broadly-cast umbrella organization including various individuals, resembled less a traditional party.⁸ It can be best described as a non-communist grouping including people with very different interests and political point of view. What all of them shared in common was only their opposition to the previous communist regime. This can explain to an extent the reasons of fragmentation of the Democratic Party since the very beginning. But the fragmentation of parties went further beyond and became a fashionable trend where even the already fragmented parties were further fragmented. The latest fragmentation was that of the Socialist Party in 2004, as a result of a major inter-party conflict among two major competing factions represented by then chairman Nano and ex-premiere Meta.

Two, seem to be the main related reasons of this 'fashionable' fragmentation of parties. First, parties act as authoritarian organizations in themselves without internal democracy and secondly, there is the eager for individual power and narrow personal interest which makes some individuals more 'comfortable' when 'having their own party' (Kajsiu Blendi, A. Bumci, A. Rakipi: 2002).

Moreover, it is this narrow personal interest that is making parties to easily break up and build coalitions with parties sometimes of a diametrically opposite political spectrum. A good example can be the Albanian Agrarian party and the Human Rights Union (PBDNJ) which broke the coalition with Socialist party after their defeat in 2005 election and made a coalition with the winning Democratic Party

The programmes of parties lack clear political positioning on a great number of important issues. That is why often we encounter right wing parties, if in power, to implement social policies and the vice versa, the Left

Wing Parties to implement more liberal, market-oriented policies. It seems that parties' policies are of secondary importance making Albanian Parties lose their identity on the ideological spectrum.

Furthermore, the parties' programmes are very general and usually include 'catchy statements' such as: integration into EU and NATO, fighting corruption, reducing poverty, increasing employment and many other like these. They are much more rhetorical rather than realistic policies since they lack full and deep strategies on how to really fulfil them. Such trends make the political differences of the Albanian political parties' programs become increasingly very much alike each other.

This explains the electorate behaviour where the vote is not a *yes* for the party program but usually it is a *no* for the party already in power.

4 Social Cleavages in the Albanian party system

In the Albanian case constantly there has been a discussion on north-south division which seems to have played a role even in the political life of the country. The two sub-groups, Ghegs (North) and Tosks (South), have in exchange dominated Albanian politics and were always divided in the ruling party and the opposition. The Ghegs ruled during King Zogu's reign (1925-1939) while the Tosks took over under communism (1945-1992). The leaders of the today Democratic Party are Gheg dominated while then ruling Socialists were Tosk dominated¹. Albanian Elections showed always a majority of Socialists and Communists votes in the southern part of Albania while in the north there is a dominance of Democrats, Royalists and Nationalists votes. A pattern that was still notable even in the last Parliamentary elections of July 2005. The Albanian right-wing parties have firstly been mainly voted by young population, a generation of anticommunist and revolutionary spirit. Meanwhile the main social base of left-wing parties have been the adult community followed latter by a bend from the adult and third generation to the young generation (Barjaba Kosta:1998). An explanation to this turn may be first, the change of the Leadership of the Socialist party since the new Socialist Leader has gain popularity; and secondly, the creation of the LSI (Socialist Movement for Integration) who draws sizeable support from the young age group. Other forms of cleavage, such as the ethnic/nationalist ones seem to have had only a minor effect on voting behaviour. It is mainly

¹ Albania - *Government and Politics*, Source: U.S. Library of Congress

in the very south of Albania were a minority of Greeks live. Regarding a religious cleavage in Albania, little or no evidence is present. This because of the previous enforced atheism during the Communist regime as well as of the myth of 'Albanianism' which made religion in Albania play no role, at least in the political scene. Of course these are not absolute distinctions since the process of social stratification has not yet occurred in Albania. The political parties have not found yet their human resources and social basis, (Barjaba, *ibidem*) neither their formation is rooted in 'the conflicts within the society'.

5 Electoral system

If political sociology is problematic when applied to the Albanian case it becomes even more problematic and complex if we want to identify the bases of party competition. In Albania the very nature of the political system is not disputed and parties do not debate the desirability of democracy and party competition. But what is disputable, is the very character of this competition. That is, do we have free and fair competition among parties that does not privilege any of them *ex ante*?

5.1 The 1996 Elections

With two parties in 1991 and thirty in 1996, Albania's party system experienced an unprecedented upsurge. The main actors in the country's political life are the Socialist Party (SP) and the Democratic Party (DP). Although the early 1990s were characterised by party pluralism, most parties did not exhibit clear social mandates and many lacked an easily identifiable political orientation. Political principles were driven by narrow personal interests that resulted in the disintegration of parties (Biberaj, 1999:276). The first multiparty elections held in March 1991 showed that voters were not too detached from the communist past. The Labour Party won an extraordinary result of 169 seats out of 240, whereas the DP only won 75 seats (Biberaj, 1999:276).

However, following the growing dissatisfaction with the old communist system, the Labour Party did not enjoy popularity for much longer. Demonstrators together with Democratic Party members called for the old elite to leave. In the next elections in March 1992 the DP won a decisive majority of 90 out of 100 seats. Once in power the DP moved the country away from

isolationist politics. It developed links with Western countries and committed itself to democratic reforms. In December 1992 Albania was the first Eastern European state to publicly announce that it wished to join NATO and some EU countries, among them Italy and France, considered the possibility of EU talks over the initiation of Association-Agreements. At that time, Albania was described as a star performer of the post communist transition (Biberaj, 1999:281).

Yet parliamentary elections in 1996 revealed severe problems. From the beginning, the political campaign was characterized by great tensions between the government and the opposition. The government consistently refused the opposition parties' request to give permission for a rally to be held in the central square of Tirana. In addition, the government used and controlled Albanian television for its election campaign (Gallagher, 2000:242 in Pridham & Gallagher eds.). Despite vast irregularities in the political campaign, the DP continued to enjoy strong international support, partially because the West feared that a return to power by the SP would equal totalitarian rule. In the elections of May 26, 1996 the DP won 95 out of 115 seats in the first round and 122 seats in the second round. The SP won a mere 5 seats in the first round and 9 in the second round (Barjaba, 1998: 12). The results were contested by the SP who claimed the elections had been fraud with large-scale irregularities. Along with other allies, such as the Socialist Democratic Party and the Democratic Alliance, they declared they would not recognize the new parliament (Biberaj, 1999:298). The then President Sali Berisha rejected charges of election manipulations and accused the Socialists of trying to deflect attention away from their incompetence and defeat. The OSCE report however revealed that 'in many instances the implementation of the law failed to meet its own criteria (OSCE Report, 1996:3). In addition, the report accused the authorities of failing to ensure that political campaigning was conducted in a free and fair atmosphere.

Berisha's stance towards the elections was criticized by international observers, especially after he ignored the request of the EU and US to postpone a second round of elections, which were held on June 16, preventing an international mechanism established for irregularity verifications (Biberaj, 1999:301). The European Parliament in particular urged Albania to hold new elections. However, President Berisha asserted that elections had been free and fair and rejected the possibility of conducting new elections.

The European Union thus, preferred stability to democracy, and the 1996 elections in Albania were recognized, both in the European Commission Progress Reports and common autochthonous narratives as non democratic elections, and thus not recognized from the international commu-

nity.

5.2 *The 1997 Elections-Albania's second chance*

The flawed May 1996 elections greatly damaged Albania's image within the international community and disputed the process of democratic consolidation under Berisha's governance. At the same time, with their boycott of the election process, the opposition demonstrated their refusal to deal with the situation through legal channels. Evidently, government and opposition leaders were dwelling in the old communist political culture. They displayed a poor understanding and performance of the hallmarks of democracy by playing the old Communist party rule of 'the winner takes all or loses entirely'.

Along with this poor political performance, the country was confronted with economic troubles caused by the failure of pyramid schemes. Thousands of Albanian investors put their savings in get-rich-quick schemes, which offered a return of up to 50 per cent interest a month. By autumn 1996 Albanians had invested close to half a billion dollars in the funds (Jarvis 2000: 5). The collapse of these schemes led to an armed revolt that undermined the government's authority over most parts of the country and isolated the country from actual democratic currents.

In March 1997 the OSCE successfully mediated an agreement between President Berisha and the opposition on early elections as well as the creation of a government of reconciliation under the Socialist Bashkim Fino. Elections held in two rounds on 29 June and 6 July were deemed as acceptable, given the prevailing circumstances (OSCE Report 1997:5).

There was a clear-cut result with the Socialist winning an overwhelming majority. In August 1997 a Socialist-led coalition government took office under Fatos Nano, the former Socialist leader who had been imprisoned under Berisha's governance under corruption charges in 1993. The elections results were proof of an angry and disappointed electorate, with the Socialists winning 52.71 percent of the votes (Biberaj 1999:337).

5.3 *The aftermath of 2001 Elections*

In the aftermath of the 2001 elections the political parties moved on to new practices and alliances. The Socialist leader Fatos Nano broke with his partners in the ongoing governing "Alliance for the State" coalition and contested the elections alone. Consequently, the SP allies faced the risk of losing their seats in Parliament as well as their governmental posts. The

Democratic Party (DP), led by the former President Sali Berisha, formed an electoral alliance and campaigned together as the “Union for Victory” (UV). Following a split within the DP, at the beginning of 2001 some of its members formed a new “Democratic Party”. Under the leadership of Genc Pollo⁴, they were an alternative to both the SP and DP. These pre-election manoeuvres revealed that both the government and the opposition still used the same old method of ‘the winner takes it all’ (Kajsiu et al. 2002).

This was reflected in the delay of the announcement of the final results, which came only after four rounds. The cause for such delay was the repeated contestation of the elections by the DP-coalition who suspected electoral fraud in certain districts. Of particular importance were events in the Dushk district, which were later baptised as the “Dushk phenomenon”. After learning of the results of the majority voting, the Socialists advised their supporters not to vote for the Socialist candidate in the proportional voting but to vote instead for the small allied parties’ candidates. Their victory would give the SP the 3/5 required parliament seats in order to have the upper hand in the presidential elections in 2002². However, such a tactic artificially augments the number of the deputies of small parties. Hence, it goes against the principle of conducting fair elections, because it grants small parties more candidates than the actual electorate possessed, and disfavours the ones with a larger electorate. Nonetheless, the SP went ahead with this new formula and won the desired seats in the new parliament.

The OSCE final report stated that the elections partially fulfil the standards and despite the irregularities they were deemed as acceptable (OSCE Report, 2001).

Nonetheless, the 2001 elections were recognized from the international community, thus constituting a pass forward in the *excursus storicus* of post-communist elections in Albania. Some political analysts argue that the EU and the international community observe domestic developments against the background of political instability (Kajsiu et al. 2001:25 and Pettifer 2001:4). As Pettifer points out, during the 2001 elections the interna-

² Albania has a mixed member proportional voting system. 100 deputies are elected through the majority voting and 40 deputies elected through proportional voting. Usually the political parties which have won the majority number of seats cannot win seats in the proportional. In the 2001 elections the SP won 73 seats in the majority voting, and 0 in the proportional voting. However, these seats were not enough for winning the 3/5 seats in the parliament, which are necessary for electing the president. Thus, in order to have the upper hand in the following presidential elections (in 2002) and gain those 3/5 seats the SP needed its allies seats in the proportional

tional actors feared that instability in Tirana would lead to a resurgence of Albanian nationalism in the context of the developing conflicts in FYROM, and the unresolved status of Kosovo. Thereby, the Socialist victory was generally welcomed, despite the wide range of irregularities.

The ripple effect of the 2001 elections could be observed in a prolonged political crisis. Firstly, the internal crisis within the SP between the chairman Nano and the ex prime minister Ilir Meta⁷ resulted in a lack of governance and paralysis of the administration. Secondly, the boycott of the parliament by the opposition, as a protest against the election manipulations, precluded the parliament decision-making. Following this impasse, the European Parliament became the dominant judging actor in the country.

In order to reach an agreement between both sides, a number of Albanian politicians were invited to participate in a meeting with the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee on January 24, 2002. The message for the Albanian elite was explicit 'unless they got their act together there was no chance for further European integration, or Stabilisation and Association Agreement' (Whyte 2002:3). The meeting turned out to be fruitful because it turned the opposition back to the parliament. However, it could not prevent the turmoil during the presidential elections. Again, the candidacy of the SP leader, Fatos Nano, led Berisha to compromise with his supporters in the national parliament, in order to increase the percentages of the voting required for electing the new president. Consequently, Berisha along with his supporters could exceed the Socialists' voting and make it impossible for the parliament to elect the president. However, as defined in Article 87, paragraph 7 of the Albanian constitution, if the parliament cannot choose the president after five rounds of voting, calls for new parliamentary elections are made (Kushtetuta e Republikës së Shqipërisë, 1998). Eventually, this would give Berisha what he had sought for: the repetition of the national elections.

At this point the European Parliament successfully brokered for the election of a consensual president. Parliament member (MP) Doris Pack navigated a resolution through the Foreign Affairs Committee calling urgently the leaders of both government and opposition to find a joint candidate for the post of the president. The resolution mentioned that the 'presidential election would be conducted in such a manner that would preserve political stability' (Whyte, 2002:2). Consequently, under external pressure both government and opposition agreed on a joint president.

The mediation of the European Parliament in the Albanian legitimacy crises was a clear success of the EU in its efforts to promote prosperity and stability. Indeed, it helped overcoming another shortcoming in Albania's

fragile democracy and opened the dialogue for the government and the opposition to elect a joint president. Furthermore, it revealed the dynamics of EU influence in the domestic politics. Based on these facts, it can be said that Kubicek's hypothesis 'sticks must be real' is relevant to the Albanian case. Nonetheless, one cannot avoid some degree of scepticism as to whether this mediation was a long-term solution to Albania's democratization process.

5.4 *The 2005 elections and electoral system-test of democracy?*

The channel of dialogue achieved between the government and opposition in choosing a consensual president was praised by EU officials and followed by a common agreement of the EU foreign ministers to officially open the negotiations on the SAA, on 31 January 2003 (Whyte, 2002:3).

The opening of negotiations was a real "carrot" offered to Albania. Referring back to Kubicek's hypothesis that 'carrots must constitute sizeable benefit' and that 'there must be certainty that political change will be rewarded' it could be expected to have the immediate effect of advancing the democratization process further (Kubicek, 2003:17). The political parties, in particular the governing SP party, knew that the signing of the SAA very much depended on the good conduct of elections and on the serious commitment to political and economic reforms. In this context, the 2005 parliamentary elections were of significant importance firstly, because they were set as a precondition for a prospective signing of the SAA within the same year.

Secondly, they would be a vital test for the Albanian democracy. In the aftermath of the 2005 elections and following the EU criticism of slow steps to reforms, the elite tried to restore the main handicaps left from the 2004 political crises. Of urgent demand was the improvement of the electoral code, which had allowed room for speculations in the past elections. Besides the amendments of the electoral code, in accordance with OSCE recommendations, the political parties signed for the first time the Ethics Code proposed by the president Alfred Moisiu³.

However, the pre-electoral process met another deadlock, because the political elite could not find a common agreement for the division of the electoral zones.

³ The Ethics Code demands that political parties do not exhibit offensive behaviour and respect the result. This Code does not exclude the possibility that political parties might contest the result.

Consequently, this reduced the time available for the election' preparations. The applicability of the "Dushk phenomenon" at a larger scale than the 2001 elections was the main concern, especially for small parties. As predicted the "Mega Dushk" (as it is called lately) happened and evidently, this time it was applied at national level. The third ODIHR report stated that 'electoral strategies described in previous EOM reports have been implemented and smaller parties involved with the main two parties prior to the elections have received significantly more votes at national level than their weight in the outgoing parliament would suggest (2005:1).

The preliminary results of the July vote led to more than 300 challenges. The Albanian Central Election Committee (CEC) ordered the rerun of elections in only three of the country's 100 electoral districts. Surprisingly, none of the main opposite parties had won sufficient seats for creating the new government, and this led to the formation of paradoxical coalitions. Thus, in order to reach the required seats for creating the government Berisha invited some SP allies along. These controversies were the reason for further delays of the announcement of the final result which was officially declared on September 2005. The following day, under great EU frustration, the second Berisha government was created.

Evidently, in its initial phase, the process did not differ in principle from past election processes. Specifically, the political actors once again were reluctant to jointly prepare the ground for holding competitive elections according to international standards. As the events showed this was reflected in continuous election rounds and to some extent abuses of the voting system (as the applicability of the electoral strategies). However, these elections brought certain novelties which can be described as significant achievements. Firstly, unlike previous parliamentary elections whereby the contestation of the result was accompanied by the losing party's boycott, this time the political actors chose legal channels to address their complaints. Secondly, the SP and other losing parties have accepted the result. Thirdly and foremost, for the first time in the post-communist Albania the change of power occurred in a peaceful environment. Nonetheless, whether Albania has passed the test of free and fair elections is disputable.

5.5 2009 elections

On 22 April 2008, the Albanian Parliament approved a set of amendments put forward to modify the Albanian constitution. The main change concerns the electoral system, which, besides being proportional, also becomes regional. According to the reform, the electoral districts should coin-

cide with one of the administrative levels of the country. This means that the number of voters, of deputies, as well as the threshold allowing the election of a parliamentarian vary from one electoral sector to another. Thus, in the most populous areas, the threshold for getting an elected official is relatively low, while in areas where the density of population is less, it is much higher. We can say that according to one of the amendments, parties not getting passed a threshold of 10% of the votes, which in some regions can reach 20%, have been deprived of representation.

Moreover, the voters are no longer called upon to express their opinion on individuals, but on the parties. The reform provides in fact for a 'depersonalisation' of the mode of voting, because the electoral ballots no longer carry the name of a candidate but only that of a party⁴.

It also provides that a party must present 140 candidates in order to be authorised to take part in an election. Similarly, a political group wishing to participate in the elections within the framework of a coalition must have at least 70 candidates. Parties not represented in Parliament have been constrained to name 70 candidates in the dozen Albanian electoral districts.

Another element of this reform is the removal of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) as an independent organ⁵. The CEC continues to exist but it has been deprived of its plurality and has become a bipartisan commission in which only the SP and DP are represented. This also means that the other political parties have not been associated with organising the elections and monitoring the voting stations.

The constitutional amendments also reinforced the powers of the Prime Minister at the expense of the President. The latter can no longer dissolve Parliament. This power henceforth belongs to the head of government, all of which will greatly complicate voting on a motion of no confidence. Moreover, it also provides that the election of the President by the national representation no longer requires a three-fifths majority but only the votes of 71 deputies out of the 140 who constitute the assembly⁶.

The reform adopted on 22 April by a vote of 115 for, 17 against and 3 abstentions was supported by the two main parties and by their leaders: Sali Berisha, the present Prime Minister, for the DP, and Edi Rama, for the SP.

⁴ 'Albania PM Pans Opposition on Poll Reforms', *BalkanInsight.com*, 30 June 2008.

<http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/11430>

⁵ Rozeta Rapushi, 'Albania: a reform of the Constitution made to measure for Sali Berisha', *Koha Jone*, 22 April 2008.

⁶ 'Albania Approves Constitutional Reforms', *Balkan Insight.com*, 22 April 2008. <http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/9571>

The amendments approved in effect strengthen the powers of the Prime Minister at the expense of those of the President.

Moreover, the constitutional reform undeniably favours the Socialists and the Democrats. The objective of the two large parties is clearly to create a system based on bipartisan power. By adding a regional and proportional dimension, the amendments rendered it quasi impossible to elect legislative representatives coming from the small parties, as is presently the case. In addition, the provisions have prevented the small parties from forming coalitions, thereby reinforcing the hold of the SP and the DP on Albanian political life. The remaining parties have been less the subject of media interest and have been thus disadvantaged and finally excluded from the Parliament.

One also notes that this reform has been carried out without discussion, not allowing the various political forces of the country to express their views on a topic having crucial stakes for Albanian political life. The existing consensus between the two principal political parties enabled them to accelerate the examination of the amendments by the Albanian Parliament. The amendments indeed were not the subject of any debate within the Parliamentary.

6 Conclusions

After the thorough qualitative description of the Albanian party system and social cleavages in relation to it, the preliminary hypotheses can be analysed as such.

6.1 *The shift from mixed proportional to regional proportional electoral system in Albania deepens the historical social cleavages*

As shown in §3 on p. 7 the post-communist era has been characterized by a north-south and a centre-periphery cleavage in Albania. The north and peripheral electoral zones voted more pro Democratic Party and the South and urban districts voted more for Socialist party. However, in the past years two main factors have influenced this traditional cleavages. First, the axis north-periphery has been maintained in the years, given the low density and absence of big urban centres in the North (albeit Shkoder), whereas the traditional axis South-urban is not anymore feasible, since huge demographic movements in the whole country may not allow to consider cities as

urban centres but more as “big agglomerates of persons” stemming from a huge variety of traditions, customs, and hence, electoral behaviours.

Second, the good performance of the right-wing government from 2005 to 2009 was expected to increase the number of voters in southern Albania.

The mixed majority-proportional electoral system in force till 2008, allowed right-wing Democratic Party to get votes on the traditional left-wing districts and the other way around (by means of mechanisms of reward of the “second party” or of small parties allied to the two main parties in the proportional). In this sense, this mechanism assured a kind of balance, not only between big and small parties, but also ensured a balance of representation in those districts where social cleavages are more remarked.

With the entry into power of the new regional proportional electoral system, the 2009 elections showed an over representation of the strongest party and an under representation of the opposition party in the territory, thus deepening the impact of the social cleavages on the electoral results. This was due, firstly to the multi-nominal electoral zones, which gave more salience to parties than to individuals; and secondly because of the “perverse” mechanism of attribution of sieges in a given electoral zones⁷. In this case, in the southern electoral areas of 2009 elections, we can note above all, an under representation of the Socialist party.

In this sense, social tensions were verified immediately after the exit polls in the southern districts of Fier and Berat, which have been the main dispute between the SP and DP, which caused the initiation of the political crises, which goes on with a high intensity even nowadays, a year after, in Albania.

On the other hand, in northern districts we can note an over representation of DP, with very few deputies elected from SP. This has caused the substantial isolation of SP in northern Albania, and in many cases, its regional internal problems.

In conclusion, the first hypotheses seems to be verified.

⁷ In fact, in the northern electoral zones there was a pair number of sieges, meaning that the Socialist party, in historical opposition in the northern area, faced a very high threshold in order to get represented. On the other hand, the number of sieges in the southern-urban areas was despair; meaning that in case of substantial parity, as it was the case in most of the electoral zones, a very low number of votes was needed in order to gain an additional siege.

6.2 *The more the shift from mixed proportional to regional proportional electoral system in, the more it creates post-electoral political destabilization.*

In the aftermath of 1997 political and economic crises, Albanian political parties along with the international community decided to put the electoral code in the Constitution, so that its modification would require a qualified majority. The mixed proportional system was thought as the one which could guarantee political stability because it would moderate hegemonic tendencies of Albanian political parties, being the latter part of their political culture. The 2005 elections showed a certain degree of stability, notwithstanding aggressive “pre-electoral” and electoral campaigns. At the end of the game, both SP and DP, were conscious of the electoral results and of the “Dushk effects”, and thus, no unintended consequences showed up, and the electoral results depended highly on the ability to construct and “deconstruct” alliances with smaller parties.

Conversely, in the 2009 elections, two unintended consequences characterized national elections. First, the non-consciousness of a substantial parity between SP and DP, and hence the major weighted role, given in good part from the new electoral code, of the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI). The second unintended consequence regarded LSI alliance with the right-wing Democratic Party.

This situation was at the basis for the upcoming political crises, with SP not recognizing electoral results, boycotting the parliament, organising a series of demonstrations and hunger strikes. Even in this case, the “dirty game” of alliances characterizing Albanian elite’s political culture didn’t disappear at all, thus making the “official leitmotiv” (fight to the Mega Dushk phenomenon) of Electoral system modification totally invalid.

But, if in 2005, SP admitted electoral results thus consecrating the first non contested government change in the post-communist Albania, the 2009 elections and new electoral system seem to have been the most important cause to the prolonged political destabilization in Albania.

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