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Political Changes in Albania 1989-1992

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Abstract

The period of the fall of the communist regime and the emergence of political pluralism is one of the most important periods of recent national history. Although this is a short period, it is packed with many important events of a political, economic and cultural nature. For more than four decades, respectively since the Second World War in Albania has ruled the Albanian Labor Party. This regime is known as one of the wildest regimes in Europe and the world. Based on the Marxist-Leninist Doctrine this regime and its suite led by dictator Enver Hoxha had good diplomatic relations in the beginning with Tito's former Yugoslavia until 1948, with which he severed diplomatic relations by declaring that "Yugoslav revisionists were neither for peace nor for socialism. They were linked to the imperialists and helped to overthrow the communist regimes in the countries bordering Yugoslavia." The Soviet Union until 1960, then seceded from the USSR and approached China that lasted until 1978, when it severed ties with China that led to the formula of self-isolation until 1991. Afterwards Albania would be the most isolated country in the world and would fanatically defend Marxism-Leninism and Stalinism that had been denounced by Khrushchev and Soviet Union. The communist regime in Albania will lead a strange and incomprehensible foreign policy. After the severance of Albania's relations with the socialist bloc, the communist ruling clique did not see the way to wake up and reconsider the issue of Albania's foreign policy in order to be oriented toward the west which would open new perspectives in the development of the Albanian society. During the 80s the economic situation in Albania will become unbearable and after all the efforts made by the Albanian Labour Party to save the regime will not succeed and when the situation came to boiling point it erupted in December 1990. The situation was followed by much unrest until the pluralist political system emerged and the victory of the Democratic Party in March 1992 came to power.

Keywords: Communism, Albania, Dictatorship, Pluralism, Democracy

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1. Introduction

The period of the fall of the communist regime and the emergence of political pluralism is one of the most important periods of recent national history [3]. Although this is a short period, but it is packed with many important events of a political, economic and cultural nature.

For more than four decades, respectively since the Second World War in Albania has ruled the Albanian Labor Party. This regime is known as one of the wildest regimes in Europe and the World. Based on the Marxist-Leninist Doctrine this regime and its suite headed by dictator Enver Hoxha had good diplomatic relations initially with Tito's former Yugoslavia until 1948, with which he broke diplomatic relations by declaring that: "The Yugoslav Revisionists were neither for peace nor for socialism. They were linked to the imperialists and helped to overthrow the communist regimes in the neighboring countries of Yugoslavia." Albania had good relations with The Soviet Union until 1960, then seceded from the Soviets and approached to China until 1978. When it severed ties with China the latter choose the formula of self-isolation. Albania would now be the most isolated country in the world and would fanatically defend Marxism - Leninism and Stalinism that later was denounced by Khrushchev and the USSR. The Cold War period which was characterized by complete division of the world in two blocs, led by Soviet Union and followed by Socialist states that were members of Warsaw Pact and by US-followed by NATO members. Albania did not belong to any block after 1960.

Well-known historian Norman Davies in his book "History of Europe", when talking about the breakdown of relations between the Soviet Union and China does not leave without mentioning Albania. He points out that this division had a direct impact on only one European country. Like the Chinese, the Albanians had significant reservations about de-Stalinization... They took the "China Road": Tirana replaced its loyalty to Moscow with that of Beijing. It remained completely Stalinist, completely collectivized and atheized, under total isolation including to its neighbors. Nothing changed in Albania until 1989. The only religion in Albania declared by Enver Hoxha was "Being Albanian" [1].

The communist regime in Albania will pursue a strange and incomprehensible foreign policy. After the severance of Albania's relations with the socialist bloc, the communist leadership clique did no reconsider the issue of Albania's foreign policy in order to reorient it to the west so it would give new perspectives in the developing Albania.

During the 70s in and in particular by the end of the 80s the economic situation in Albania will become unbearable and after all the efforts made by the ALP to save the regime there was too late. The measures taken will not succeed and the situation came to boiling point that erupted in December 1990 by massive demonstrations. The situation was followed by many major upheavals until the pluralistic political system emerged and the victory of the Democratic Party in March 1992.

2. The collapse of Communism

The end of the '80s and the beginning of the '90s marks the most important period in the contemporary world history and also the Albanian national one. The end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War

divided the world for more than four decades where anxiety and phobia gripped all the states that lay on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Although Albania physically (geographically) lay on the side of European Iron Curtain, it belonged politically and ideologically to the socialist camp. It was precisely this geostrategic position of Albania that made it the most enviable to put under the clutches of both blocks. "The smallest and least developed state in the Balkans has traditionally played a role that is not commensurate with its size and power." [3]

"This period marks the end of the communist system, a regime that has enslaved hundreds of millions of people around the world." For those caught up in the security network, their suffering was compared to Stalin's Great Terror of the 1930s. Still in this labor camp regime, arbitrary arrests, beatings, and killings continued until 1990, three decades after Khrushchev's secret speech, five years after the death of the last old Soviet-style leader, and after the fall of Berlin Wall." [2]. In the name of classless society, equality, common property, or collectivism, a terrible life had begun for the inhabitants of the communist states, and the attempt to indoctrinate the brains of the people with Marxist-Leninist ideology was one of the most terrible and mysterious systems what in reality was intended to be presented as ideal while in practically it degenerated human values. At what level was the political system in Albania, Walter Lacer estimates that: "Albania was a curious mixture of primitive communism and nationalism, where clans played a key role" [1].

Since Albania had been one of the countries that had embraced this political concept by the end of the Second World War, then its citizens will have the chance to "enjoy" the prosperity offered by this state regulation, though it will deepen chasm between the rulers and the governed which will not be easily healed.

At the time when riots broke out throughout Eastern Europe and the end of the communist regime began to appear in this part of the world, this wave of riots included Socialist Albania at the time when the demands for the democratization of the country began to show up. Hence, the Albanian case clearly shows the endogenous and exogenous nature of the change that took place in the Balkans [3]. The communist regime in Albania, with the oppression it had done to its own people, was known as one of the most brutal dictatorial regimes in the world. Torture of various kinds. "This is how the diplomas of knowledge and freedom obtained in Vienna, Paris, London and Rome fill the prisons. The big doors and properties disappear. The rot of hope begins. The Albanian time marks the loss of dignity, as soon as it takes the name "era of the Party", "era of Enver Hoxha" and specifically it is marked in ant-time, when the spying formula "on behalf of the Party", "its interests", or Enver Hoxha's "takes the tragic measure of determining human destinies and beyond." [1] This terrible stage was coming to an end. Communism was collapsing throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The events in Romania and the fate of Ceausescu, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the riots throughout the Socialist Camp warned that something fundamental was changing in international politics and in the communist command structures themselves throughout the socialist world who had apparently lost control and now they were not able to lead the processes that emerged but on the contrary these structures were overtaken by the flood of waves of liberalization and democratization of society and carried them almost as it wished with all its best efforts from the Marxist-Leninist suite to still maintain the monopoly in all areas of life in society. This situation was soon reflected in Albania, and no degree of state oppression was able to withstand the energies of the youth themselves, regardless of the

orientations of the state. [3].

Despite the efforts made by Ramiz Alia, the successor of Dictator Enver Hoxha to change the aggravated economic, political and social situation it will not be successful. The government-sponsored reforms are ostensibly aimed at easing the economy, [4].

At a time when Albania in terms of foreign policy was a completely isolated state by the outside world as from the socialist camp to which it belonged) from 1944-1960 with the USSR, then with China until the breakdown of relations in 1978 and also from the Western capitalist camp. This total isolation undoubtedly had serious implications for the development of the country. The social system was doomed to fail on its own as the country's economy failed, rural cooperatives, thousands of small and medium enterprises and large factories were operating at a loss but for political reasons did not dare to close, one of them was the factory of Elbasan with about 10,000 workers.

Unemployment was rising daily, poverty was gripping Albanian society even more, mass illiteracy, widespread superstitions, blood feuds and devastating epidemics [3]. Developments taking place in Eastern Europe greatly worried Ramiz Alia and the leading socialist clique of Albania, but still they hoped to manage and control the broad masses by using the mechanisms of Stalinist dictatorial power. Although the right to free speech and opinion was still not allowed, although the only state media in the country maintained strict censorship and did not report on the events taking place in Eastern Europe, Albanians now relied more on foreign radio broadcasts in especially "Voice of America" in Albanian, Italian and Yugoslav television.

"Even though Gorbachev himself in the Soviet Union had begun to unravel and begin to implement some reforms, Ramiz Alia and the Albanian communists considered it revisionism and were convinced that such a thing could not happen in Albania." [3]. The communist regime still somehow enjoyed widespread popular support, Ramiz Alia called on Albanians to learn from the danger of following the example of the Soviet bloc and not to allow the restoration of capitalism.

Although the overthrow of the Ceausescu regime in Romania disturbed the Albanian communist clique, whose brutal methods were so little compared to those of Enver Hoxha. A month before Ceausescu was assassinated, he himself had ruled out such reforms in Romania, but the situation was different.

On January 14, 1990, anti-government demonstrators in Shkodra tried to topple a statue of Stalin, which was later forcibly extinguished. On January 28 in Tirana, a large silent protest rally was organized by the students, raising their hands with the sign of victory. In an country that once had no trust even between a husband and wife, this way of protesting talked a lot.

Now the ALP was looking at the possibilities of how to overcome this situation. To start with the liberalization of the economy first and then in other spheres of life by implementing them gradually while there were also voices that were looking at the possibility of reforming the Labor Party from within, finally separating it from the Labour Party nomenclature and the legacy of its negative [3], but still did not even consider allowing a pluralistic system.

3. The attitude of intellectuals in the beginnings of democracy

There was no organized opposition in Albania Ramiz Alia in August 1990 had organized a meeting with the country's intellectuals ostensibly to inform them of the reforms undertaken, but in fact he had done so in order to exploit them and come out in public that supposedly the intellectual elite stands behind him and the reforms he had proclaimed. From the beginning it set the tone, rejecting the idea of a multi-party system.

Although the meeting was taking place in a tense atmosphere, some intellectuals openly expressed their concern about the slow pace of reforms. One of the participants was Sali Berisha, who openly criticized the half-baked reforms and went further, demanding that a pluralistic political system be established. But Ramiz Alia responded briefly to Berisha, saying "There is no alternative. "We have to be clear about that." Berisha "the hero of this meeting remained only because none of the participants had the courage to support him".[3].

The silence of the intellectuals enabled the communist clique to a propaganda victory. But on the other hand, this meeting hit hard, even temporarily, the intellectual layer that was in favor of reforms. This clearly showed that now the obstacle to the implementation of reforms was Ramiz Alia himself.

Also one of the factors that accelerated the democratic processes in Albania was Kosovo which had started a plural life and had already formed various parties, where now the intelligentsia and the masses in Albania were following it closely and according to them it would be absurd that in a occupied Kosovo to allow pluralism and in an independent Albania such a thing should not be allowed.

After all these events Ramiz Alia will again try to survive. On November 6-7, 1990, in the 12th Plenum of the Central Committee, he announced that he would further liberalize the economy and the issue of human rights, but did not allow political pluralism, although it would allow organizations that were more affiliated with LP to present their candidates in the elections.

4. The student movement of December '90

The situation in the student dormitories had begun to boil. Prime Minister Adil Çarçani met with a group of students in early December and promised that conditions would improve but no immediate action was taken. Dissatisfaction erupted on December 8, as Adil Çarçani went to the student city and tried to find a solution but was unsuccessful. In the evening, Berisha, after returning from a trip abroad, was the first genuine intellectual to join the protesters. As the situation escalated, on December 9, although the people were still reluctant to openly support them, the students were determined to continue the process. On the third day the people began to gather at the Student City. The situation was becoming extremely tense. Ramiz Alia and the Central Committee were discussing and was in a dilemma to use force or otherwise accept the demands of the students. The reformists dominated and the use of force was not allowed.

On December 11, 1990, in a meeting with students, Ramiz Alia acknowledged political pluralism. [3]. Lory, 2007, p, 232). On December 12, after 45 years, the first opposition party, the Democratic Party, was finally formed. This also brought down the last communist castle in Europe

5. Establishment of the Democratic Party

The Democratic Party in the quickly drafted program reflected aspirations for democracy. There were many omissions and mistakes, but nevertheless opened a new option and hope for the Albanians. At the rally that the Democratic Party held in Tirana on December 12, in front of 100,000 people, Berisha, its main leader, in addition to making it clear that the DP would fight to establish a genuine Western democratic system, he also emphasized something that was not mentioned by the communists, the issue of the Albanians of Yugoslavia.

It had no clearly defined ideology other than the support of democracy that had made its existence possible. [2] It was initially headed by a 17-member committee and chaired by the courageous student leader Azem Hajdari. In this committee there were only 6 members from the students and the rest was from intellectuals with different views that some had been members of the LP, therefore this committee suffered from divisions from the beginning. Azem Hajdari represented the radical line while some intellectuals were more lenient with the regime and were not in favor of an open anti-communist policy.

On January 5, 1991, the first issue of the PD newspaper "Rilindja Demokratike" was published, which was the first opposition newspaper in Albania after 1945. At first it was allowed to come out with a circulation of 60,000 copies twice a week, compared to "The Voice of the People" which came out in 100,000 copies six times a week. [1]

The parliamentary elections were scheduled for February 10, 1991, while the Democratic Party disagreed as it considered that there was not enough time to organize the elections so it demanded that they be postponed, otherwise it was threatened that it would boycott the elections. The government, close to this pressure, announced that the elections were postponed to March 31, 1991.

In addition to the Democratic Party, other parties were formed. One of the sister parties of the Democratic Party was the Republican Party, where after deep divisions Sabri Godo was elected its chairman, although his rivals accused him of being a state security agent and that he had sent Ramiz Alia to become chairman of the RP. It is worth noting that the RP was against the rallies organized by the DP ostensibly that they destabilized the country. [4] Other parties continued to emerge, such as the Ecological Party, the Agrarian Party, the National Unity Party, and the Omonia organization, which represented the Greek minority in the country.

6. The first democratic elections in Albania after 1945 (March 31, 1991)

The international factor will be interested in the elections in Albania therefore 260 observers will come to Albania also joined by international media. For the first time, the world press would inform about the democracy that was being born in Albania. Almost every announcement in the Western press included the word > The last bastion of Stalinism that is collapsing <and used words like <backward>, <primitive> and <out of time>, to describe the European country that had given to journalists a "cultural shock" greater than they would have received from most Third World countries [3].

This election campaign is characterized by a host of irregularities, ranging from the regime's continued pressure

on the masses, using all the mechanisms at its disposal, from the print and electronic media to the state security structures that were fully available of the ALP. It was this that made it easier for the DP and other opposition parties to penetrate the cities because of the faster and free communication and the higher awareness that reigned than among the peasantry, where the villages were kept more isolated and as it was said then they were in the dark of information and the masses were more easily manipulated by the old communist structures. The deputy chairman of the Republican Party Hysen Çobani called the village "the last stronghold of communism". It was more of a government to fill the vacuum between the youth, town and village, the opposition and the communists, until early elections were held next year. [3]

7. Elections of March 22, 1992

After much controversy over the election law between the political parties, a compromise was finally reached and it was approved by parliament on February 4, 1992. The previous law had divided the country into 250 constituencies, and now under the new law the country is divided into 100 constituencies and also according to the proportional system the rest of the deputies had to be elected, where the parliament had to have at least 140 deputies.

Although the economic and political situation was quite aggravated, free and more democratic elections will still be possible now. Unlike the '91 election, when fears of opposition and police persecution of opposition supporters prevailed, law enforcement either sided with or sided with the opposition. It can be said that these were the most democratic elections ever held in Albania.

The pre-election atmosphere warned that March 22 would mark a radical and historic change in Albanian politics, and the Albanian transition enters the second phase [2] . Undoubtedly, the aggravated economic situation of the country and the demoralization of the masses and the trust that the Socialists had finally lost in the people would play a special role in these elections.

The increase in support for the DP came as a result of the support given to it by the Kosovo Albanian intellectual elite both within it and in the diaspora.

Another important factor that directly influenced the pre-election campaign was the American support for the DP where its Ambassador in Tirana also participated openly in the DP rallies. Berisha's visits to the US twice a year and the meeting with senior officials, the visit of US Secretary of State to Albania James Baker at Berisha's personal invitation, however, made it clear that radical changes were now expected.

The final results were unexpected and significantly exceeded the opposition's predictions. The DP won in 90 out of 100 constituencies, while the SP suffered catastrophic losses by winning only 6 constituencies. The Union for Human Rights won 2 constituencies and the Social Democratic Party and the Republican Party

They won from one constituency. While in the proportional system the division of seats went in favor of the Socialists and Social Democrats who received more than 4% of the vote nationally. The SP also took 32 seats

according to the proportional system and reached a total of 38 seats, while the PSD received 6 additional seats.

On April 9, with 96 votes in favor and 35 votes against Sali Berisha, he will be elected President of Albania.

On April 10, Berisha appointed Aleksandër Meksi, a well-known archaeologist but without political experience, as prime minister. Bashkim Kopliku and Rexhep Uka were appointed deputy prime ministers. While the post of speaker of parliament was taken by Pjetër Arbnori.

This convincing victory of the Democratic Party opened a new page in national history and new perspectives for Albanians who were finally parting from their bleak past and being repositioned in the direction of Western Europe and the USA.

8. Conclusions

One can conclude that the period in 1989-1992, despite being short, occupies a special chapter in national history. It combines the interests of different classes of the people with different ideological views. A special role will play the communist structures that will make maximum efforts to survive on their own through the survival of the ALP and the communist system in general. The decorative movement that originated among the students and quickly spread to the masses also played great role. These student movements, which were later supported by the genuine intellectual, will cause headaches for Ramiz Alia and his collaborators who will use any form of pressure on the student movement for democracy. The more the pressure on the Democratic Movement increased, the more its mass support increased. This took the situation out of control and a serious situation prevailed in Albania.

The attempt by the ALP to defend the communist system and the unnecessary delays they caused in allowing political pluralism in Albania led to the total failure of the entire state system and consequently increased the suffering of the people.

These riots in Albania were taking place at a time when great changes were taking place throughout Eastern Europe. In the socialist states of Eastern Europe, the one-party system had already ended and plural political life had begun. Undoubtedly these events were reflected in Albania. This kind of information was now released through foreign media that reported on the situation in Eastern Europe and in Albania itself, as the media in the country were still kept under strict control.

Despite the scenarios staged by the ALP, the security organs, and the state structures in general, the democratic movement proved tireless and invincible. She did not give up despite the sacrifices they made. The epilogue of all these riots brought democracy to Albania and finally the communist dictatorship fell. In this important event, however, the Western international factor gave tremendous help to these democratic movements and they openly supported the Democratic Party.

However, it is important to note that the leaders of the democratic process in Albania did not give up and agreed to make the sacrifice just to liberate the country from that savage communist regime and at the same time, although

with a little delay, Albania pursued the social changes that were taking place in Central and Eastern Europe.

Eventually, Albanians would feel free and organized in political parties, which means freedom of thought, freedom of expression and political freedom, which had been a Forbidden Apple for Albanians for more than 47 years.

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