Western Balkans, Albania and the Diatribe between Development and Change

Ilda Jeha, PhD Candidate
Faculty of Law, University of Tirana, Albania
Director of 'ISSAT' Institute of Strategic Studies and Training, Tirana, Albania

Ylli Çabiri, PhD
Director of Human Development Promotion Center (HDPC) Tirana, Albania

Abstract

While there is a clear tendency to address research of the ratio between change and development for very specific cases in comparison with the level of various countries, we think that we should go beyond such situation and focus rather on analysing and studying transition in former Communist countries.

Such analysis could even lead to finding out the reasons for more attention being paid to change instead of development, but the influence of the tendency of the international partners in Albania and the entire region of the Western Balkan in favour of change and to the detriment of development has had its adverse and irreparable consequences.

Keywords: development; change; transition; governance; international partners; democracy.

Introduction

Change and Development are both separate concepts[1] and are only confused by those who deliberately want to do so. The numerous studies into this topic show a tendency towards studying and analysing specific cases such as organizational management[2]/[3], business change and development, technology[4], education[5], sociology, psychology, media, communication[6], etc. from the perspective of the limited concept of replacing something with something else of the same type. We have not, however, come across any studies or articles addressing the change of the system in different countries, which requires development afterwards. We do understand such diversion, but despite the extreme "*scorched earth"* challenge, we will try to make a more complex analysis of this issue, putting Albania in the centre of the debate.

[1] Jacobs, J., Change vs, Development: Is there a difference?, Focus Magazine, Victoria, Canada, April 15, 2010.

[2] Fannin, K., Organizational Change and Transformation, 6 Critical Differences and Why they Matter, INTELIVATE, February 13, 2018.

[3] Organizational Change: Development and Transformation, Gret Books Online, 2016.

[4] The Change and Development of the Qantas Airlines, Gret Books Online, 2016.

[5] Curriculum Development and Change Essay, Gret Books Online, 2016.

[6] Arnold, AK., Media Development vs. Communication for Development: Structure vs. Process, The World Bank, May 8, 2010.

Every country resists[7] change. This is related with its past and depends on how fast its mentality can change. This is because mentality changes more slowly and may serve as a reference. The change of a system, though, is much more complex and difficult. And this is not only *internally due* to mentality. In the case of small countries, the biggest *external* difficulty is related with the international partners leading change and development, who do not have sufficient experience with how systems change. In the absence of such experience, they try to "invent" a path we can take, although this is sometimes not the shortest one.

In Albania, political change came as in every other Eastern country, without anyone being asked whether it could come. It just happened, and the country was involved in a swift political and economic transition with lots of courage. Albanians were frustrated with the previous system and perceived the democratic system as more appropriate. Such a huge change required the country to develop. It was development what gave people courage to silently accept the tiring reforms ahead. Change without development was nothing for everyone, because everyone thought the democratic system would provide unlimited employment opportunities to all, and that poverty would be alleviated to the point of being forgotten. This, however, would take several reforms, which would certainly cost. It was precisely the big wish for change, which gave people the courage to cope with every consequence of such reforms. Various international partners, however, had their own objectives regarding Albania, which did not necessarily correspond with these ideas, and were not always the same for each partner. Under such circumstances, we think that the most comfortable position for them was to support change at any cost and in no time. Albania had no clear idea whatsoever. That was because no one knew whether it should have been change which came first and followed by development, or both at the same time, especially with the international partners being actually the ones, who would finance both minds and reforms to be undertaken.

Change and development are separate concepts[8] and are only confused by those who deliberately want to do so.

Methodology

We have analysed in details both the local and foreign literature on political and economic transition in former Communist countries, as well as the evolution of the legal framework in these countries. The political and electoral programs of each party have also been studies, as well as their results and those of their coalitions in elections. The evaluation of the concept of *Development* and *Change* in Albania is based on a

[7] Ford, Jeffrey D, Ford, Laury W., Resistance to Change a Reexamination and Extension, Research in Organizational Change and Development, Vol 17, UK, 2009.

[8] Jacobs, J., Change vs, Development: Is there a difference? Focus Magazine, Victoria, Canada, April 15, 2010.

comprehensive analysis of the numerous examples shared during interviews with key characters of the Albanian transition, and the opinions expressed by many people, who were willing to respond to a special online survey.

The survey was intended to help us understand clearly what the perception of the public is when it comes to the ration between change and development, and especially their opinion about the role of international partners during transition in the context of that ration. The survey enabled us to identify the perception of a much larger number of people than 'traditional' surveys. The average number of answers to each question was more than 3800 answers; in addition to the 20 interviews with the key figures of Albanian transition, there were also six focus group discussions to gather specialised opinions about the actual ratio between development and change, the role of the local political parties about such ratio, and the influence of the opinion of the international partners on that ratio. Testing our opinions and deductions on the matter was yet another goal of such discussions.

Stability or Democracy?

The concept of Change and Development have been first involved in the debate about stability and democracy. This concept was for the first time discussed by UNDP in Tirana, in the context of the Human Development Report[9], but the discussion was not very direct. It was found, however, that the international partners tended to focus more on stability than democracy.

It was, therefore quite clear that the international community was insisted more on stability in the case of the Western Balkans countries. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, stability was guaranteed by Dayton Agreement, which was agreement on ending the war, and not simply on establishing democracy. And war did actually end, but Bosnia and Herzegovina is actually the last country in the region. Now, following unsuccessful steps for years, the country is more and more clearly realizing that what it needs is a new agreement, one on a new democratic order, because war is no longer an option for solution. So, stability is guaranteed, but democracy is not making a lot of progress, which indicates clearly the position of this country in the process of European Union integration. While in a more advanced position in this process, Albania tempts its international partners to expect more stability for the country out of the fear of the recurrence of the evil 1997. A clear external effort for instability has also contributed to this tendency towards instability. So, the stand of the international partners regarding Albania is not conditioned by their fear of genetic instability, but also due to influence of geopolitics. What about democracy then? It is always wrongly assumed that the country stability is the priority, while democracy can be built step-by-step. This stand is now further 'refined' and no more is longer said

[9] UNDP, The Human Development Report – Albania 2002, Tirana, 2002.

about the ratio between stability and democracy. It is only the ratio between change and development that is addressed.

Development or Change?

Almost all the respondents think that the political and economic transition in Albania, which started in 1991, is prolonged and only a significant number of them (about 4% out of 3622 answers in total) consider the transition period as normal for a country like Albania. These were even fewer than those who said 'don't know' (see Figure 1). It remains unclear, however, for all when the political and economic transition can be considered over.

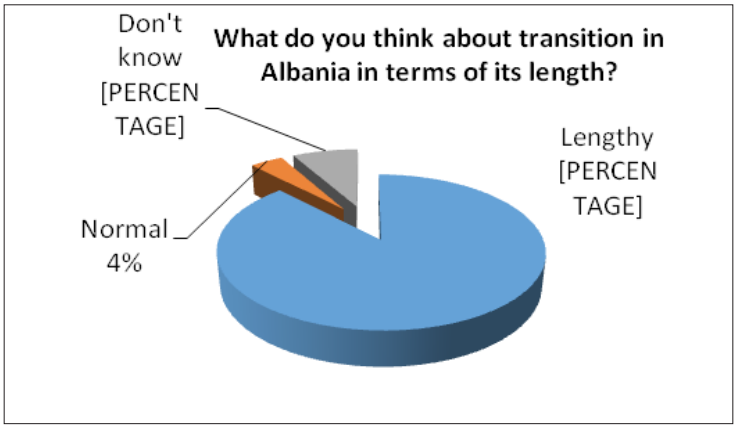

Figure 1: Transition in Albania is considered lengthy

In addition to the slow reform of the mentality of the previous system and various sectors of economy, such prolongation seems to have been significantly influenced also by the attitude of our main international partners[10] to change and development in Albania. Most of them have made a clear choice: *Albanians must change the system, putting an end to Communism once for all. Development is not possible unless such change occurs.* This is a firm and consistent opinion, without saying or explaining, however, when change is over and development starts.

The World Bank itself, having first spent millions of dollars on assisting Albania with the intention of first restructuring and then privatizing the state-owned enterprises, changed its opinion when they realized that it would have been much easier and much more efficient for the state budget to first privatise them and let their new owners restructure them at their own costs. Colossal damage was already done though. There could be no such firm decision, here the path of change did not seem to be known that well.

[10] The main international partners for Albania have always been the United States of America and the European Union.

Nevertheless, it was strongly insisted in creating a mentality of eradicating communism. The change of the political system in Albania and the establishment of democracy and market economy were 'entrusted' to the international partners, as larger and more experienced with fighting communism and establishment of the market economy. Since the beginning, the motto of everyone in Albania was *"Let's make Albania like all Europe!"* The United States of America, on the other hand, have always been a lighthouse to Albanians, which was also clearly expressed on the visit of Mr. Baker[11] (James A. Baker) in Tirana in the summer of 1991, when change had already started.

Many of the industrial works that could have survived in technological terms, were destroyed and ended up increasingly worse under the motto that they were built by the Communists, and had therefore to be demolished and new and better ones had to be built! The Metallurgic Factory in Elbasan, Textile Factory in Berat, Factory of Instruments in Korça, Cable Factory in Shkodra, Cooper Mine, Enrichment Factory, Factory of Azotic Fertilisers, etc., are some of the examples, which did have all the technical possibility to even partially survive technological competition, without affecting people's employment. It was late when people realised that no one intended to finance such amounts of money, and that these works turned out to be irreplaceable. The stand towards factories already built in the previous system, clearly expressed also by many international partners, affected us all, because that wealth belonged to us and not only to those who lost their jobs, leaving their country and family behind. The cost of such wrong mentality was unimaginable and losses unrecoverable for the country and for each one of us! Home policy was also very conservative, hindering concessions and privatisations as much as possible. It would have been completely different for these facilities and the respective communities if the decision makers were open-minded to globalization and if they would have 'given' such facilities to those, who knew better than us how to use them, and who actually came here to 'take' them. We did not do that, and we destroyed them. Was it ignorance? Narrow-mindedness? It could be, but our research shows that there is more to it.

None of the international partners, who had in their hands the steering wheel of a small country like Albania, did not 'think' of the country's development, while 'batteries' focused on the fight against Communism, i.e. change, as if Communism had been for the first time invented in Albania. This also explains why transition in Albania is not yet over (see Figure 2), where the "*finger of blame*" points to the national governments (about 45% of 3737 answers) as to the international partners as well (32%).

[11] Mr James A Baker was at the time the Secretary of Foreign Affairs in the Government of President Clinton.

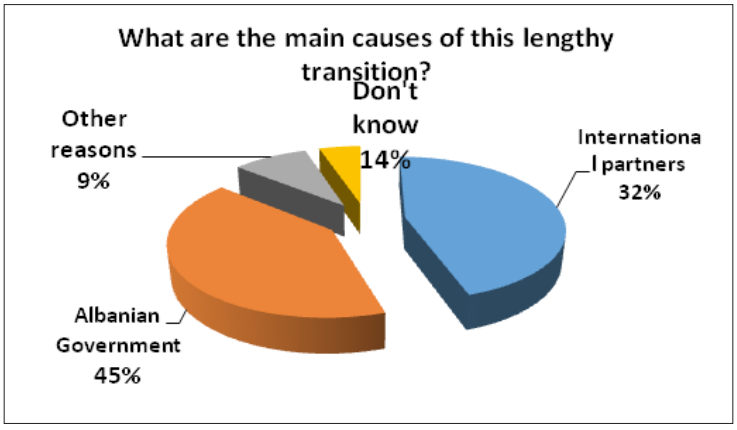

Figure 2: Transition prolonged by international partners?

Since our international partners, (those who until yesterday were considered Albanians' biggest hope), were considered one of the main cases of our lengthy transition, we decided to go deeper into our study. This is because we find it impossible to explain how the international partners have not yet deemed it reasonable to draft a reform strategy even after 27 years of political change. Us? Well, we would not do that on our own anyway. There are also often incomplete explanations made by them in assessing the progress made reforms in the country, like "*Albania has made one important more step ahead*" or "*Albanians are entering a new stage*", etc. without indicating where Albania is actually headed, or how many more steps are to be taken, when this transition is expected to be over, while everyone is losing their patience, thinking how much more we need to develop to be like everybody else.

Ultimately, it is clear that this prolongation is much more related with how others selectively choose between our Change and Development. In the meantime, most of the Albanian people think that the actual ratio between Change and Development is in favour of change (59% of 3826 answers), with only a few of the respondents (18%) thinking that change and development in Albania have been balanced, while many more (about 11%) consider this ratio normal (see Figure 3). This means that focussing so much on change and assessing only indicators of democracy has not favoured development at all (if not hindering it, this has at least not encouraged it).

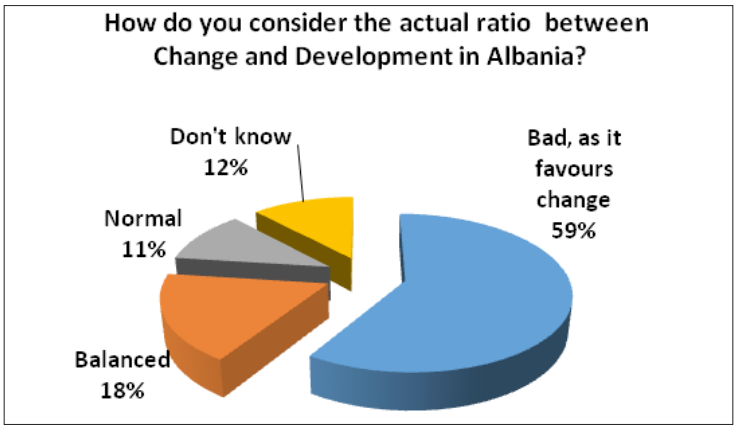

Fig 3: Balance between change and development

The ignorance of the local experts and the blind trust on the international experts could have been the real reasons of this mentality, for which Albanians are paying a high price. However, what is more important than this analysis is the overall opinion about the theoretical ratio between change and development (see Figure 4). The majority of the answers (51% of the 3,126 answers in total) are in favour of a parallel progress on Change and Development. This means that the majority today thinks that in addition to fighting communism and building a democratic system, it is very important for the country to develop in parallel. Being at the same time against the scepticism of the supporters of the Communist system, this would prove better, the great advantages of the democratic system compared with the previous system. Why was then the actual ratio not challenged?

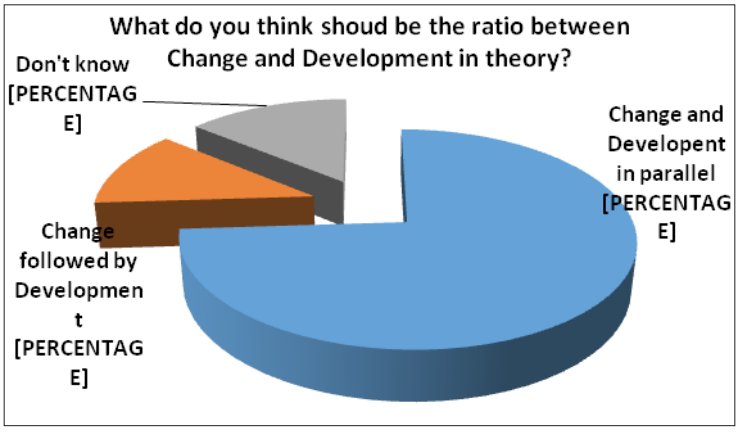

Figure 4: Theoretical ratio between change and development

Development would enable economic stability, alleviate poverty, attract foreign investments, and increase employment. There is no reason for all of this to be left for "later", giving priority to change, as was actually the case.

It must be clear for everyone that beyond the political and media debate, the system in a small country like Albania would ultimately happen anyway, because Communism was not a system that emerged and developed in this country only. The overwhelming majority of the population did not want Communism, and tried to immediately take advantage of democracy. Political parties in the country, on the other hand, keep saying for their own purposes, that Communism is not yet dead in Albania.

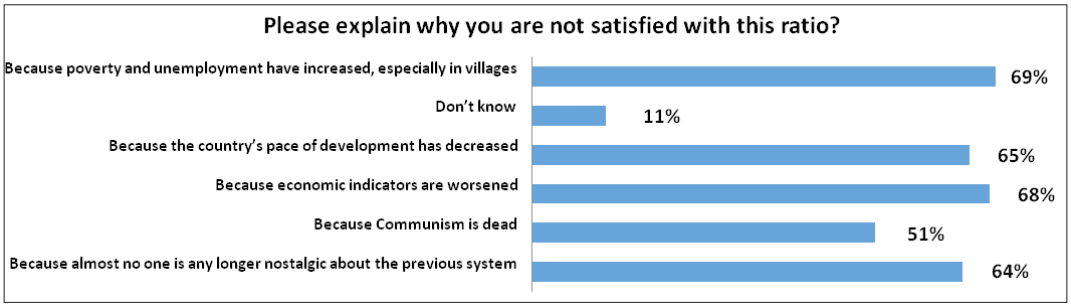

Figure 5: Country's development indicators are worsened

Figure 5 reflects the opinion about why Albanians are not satisfied with the actual ratio between Change and Development. It can be seen that more than 65% of the answers out of 3,887 answers in total think that according to international reports, the indicators of the country's development, have worsened. Actually, 69% of the people think that poverty and unemployment have increased, especially in villages. Also, many people think that Communism in Albania is dead (51%) and that almost no one is nostalgic about the previous system (64%). Therefore, politicians and decision makers should no longer blame the Communist system, but take all the responsibilities for the consequences of everything they do or not do.

Conclusions and recommendations

Modern literature addresses slightly the concept of Change and Development at the level of countries and the ratio between them. This concept is rather treated in specific areas, because it is in our opinion easier to address the ratio between change and development in terms of specific areas than at the level of countries. In the case of Albania, this is about changing the system. When Communism was ousted, a new era started for Albanians, the era of a democratic system. Being that the building of the democratic system based on the destruction of the previous one goes through

a new and not properly known by all the stakeholders, including the international partners, it is understandable how difficult it is to be aware of the shortcuts. This is so true that turning back was several times necessary due to recommended paths were too long and expensive. This does not include the fact that international partners have often had their own strategies for each country in the region, which did not necessarily correspond with the country's priorities. It is strongly recommended that the transition of former Communist countries be further studies, especially in terms of the ratio between change and development.

Debate on the ratio between Change and Development is preceded by a similar debate on stability and democracy. International partners have often been more interested in the stability of the countries of the Western Balkan than for the development of their democracy. This has led to many negative consequences for each of these countries. A new agreement focused on development is recommended for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In fact, transition in the case of Albania, as in every country in the region, is procrastinated. There is not yet any written criteria about the closure of political and economic transition in the country. What is only known is that Albanians have a plan A, and the Sllavics a plan B. Yet, the accession of the countries of the region in the European Union is facing an unmeasurable skepticism of the EU member states due to their perception of the region as not properly developed economically and politically. Clear criteria are recommended to be written for the closure of the political and economic transition, so that transition is not indefinite and any subjective assessment is avoided.

A serious problem is that, the finger is pointed also (and for the first time) at the International Partners for this lack of Development. The skepticism of the EU countries about EU membership of the countries in this region is in this case the skepticism of the guilty ones, those who did not encourage development, who did not show sufficient interest in the development of the Western Balkan ghetto because of priorities related simply with their mentality about change.

Naturally, retrospective enables us to make more objective assessments of the ratio between Change and Development, but time seems to be the most irrelevant variable in this kind of assessment. What matters is that the majority thinks that Change and Development must progress in parallel. Dissatisfaction with lack of attention for development, and actually neglecting it, emerges mostly from anti-Communist mentality, the ousting of the system, while the majority thinks that this system no longer exists. Intensive efforts are recommended to be made for better indicators of the economic development as the only path towards alleviating poverty and increasing employment, especially in villages.

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