

**THE CIVIL AND POLITICAL SOCIETY DURING NATION  
BUILDING PERIOD IN ALBANIA: 1912-1939**

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**Abstract**

*The Albanian history is full of consecutive invasions that have continued for different centuries. The power has been in the hands of foreigners for different centuries. Therefore, the social and political conscience was mainly composed of the survival concept. The governance of the Ottoman Empire was based on the military and political power instead of a market's dynamics. This factor has prevented for a long period of time the development of a middle and urban class that is the base of every modern society. As the author E. Vlora highlighted the society was divided in two main categories: the nobles composed of landowners and some few bourgeois that have never been democrats and the massive population composed of peasants, shepherds, soldiers that used to follow their leaders.*

*Due to these factors, after the declaration of the independence in 1912, the efforts for the development of a civil or political society were not easy to undertake. This paper will try to analyze the dynamics and the logic of the creation and development of a civil and political society in the nation building period. The analysis will be focused on the evaluations of different social, historical and cultural factors that have strongly influenced the process of the creation of the civil and the political class. In the framework of this paper the civil society will be assumed as a community based on communication, persuasion, consensus and diversity (Almond and Verba, 1963). With the term political class will be intended the community of people that is or tries to be to be part of the political power and government.*

**Keywords:** *Civil Society, Political Class, Nation Building*

**Introduction**

The absence of tolerance, consensus and understanding among the political class in is one of the most discussed problems in Albania since the beginning of the transition in early 1990's. The continuous conflict between political forces is becoming one of the most relevant concerns not only for the society but also for the

international organizations that are monitoring the democracy's consolidation. The research question of this paper is: Is the actual Albanian political and civil culture traditionally transmitted from the state building history? The main hypothesis of this paper is based firstly on the Putman's claim (1993: pp.1) that politics is oriented by the institutions and the institutions are oriented by the state history and secondly on the argument that the civil culture of a country is reflecting the history which is hereditary from one generation to another (Filo 2004, pp.59). The purpose of this paper will be to highlight some characteristics of the civil and political culture development during the nation building period (1912-1939), in order to find out if these elements can still be found in the actual situation.

Firstly, through the theoretical framework and method will be discussed the correlation between the civil and political culture and the politics' performance in the democratic modern systems. In this way we can understand why it is important to look into the civil and political culture for a better understanding of a general panorama on the performance of the political system. In the same section the method will explain the way the research is conducted.

Secondly, through the analysis of the civil society during the state building period, will be indicated the main elements that have designed the attitudes of both political class and civil society. This analysis will also give explanations of the social, economic, historical factors that have marked the civil society and the political class.

Thirdly, will be shown, the common elements of the civil and political culture noted in both periods: nation building and democracy building. In this way we can answer to the question if the political and civil culture that is actually dominating in Albania is or is not transmitted by the historical period that coincide with the first steps of the state creation.

### **Theoretical Framework and Methods**

The democracy's performance is strongly connected to the civil development of a society. In accordance to the results of Lijphart (1988: pp.55-56), the twenty-four most developed democracies in the world, have in common, not only a strong economy based on the free market, urbanization, industrialization and high level of education but also some common cultural values that consists in civil characteristics of a society.

Some principles and values like regulations, hierarchy, authority, solidarity, belief, and conflicts' solutions are the main elements that compose the general frame of a civil society. These values are a perception of the history and politics (Brown 1977, pp.1).

The social and economic modernization, which is the result of the industrial revolution in one hand and the civil community which consists in social cohesion and solidarity, at the other, are the two most important factors that can influence the democracy's performance (Putman 1993, pp.64). The economic development together with the industrialization makes possible the enlargement of the middle class, that is the base of a modern democratic society. In addition the civil society consists in participating citizens in the public issues, solidarity, trust, political equity (Putman 1993, pp.82), voluntary associations (Walzer 1974, pp.64), which all together makes possible the existing of a communication bridge between the politics and the society. The solidarity and the sense of community are enforced by four factors like: the norms of participation, the tools of participation, the feelings towards the community and the tradition.

The civil culture in Albania during the nation building will be explored through the literature based research method. At the same time the method of the literature review will be used in order to explore some elements of the civil culture during the transition period.

### **Civil Culture in Albania During the Nation Building**

In order to facilitate the research and to have a clearer panorama of the developments of the civil culture, the historical period of the nation building will be divided into two subsections that consist with two different phases.

The first one begins with the Declaration of Independence in 1912 and ends in 1920. During this period of time Albania lost its independence in 1914 when the country was entrusted to the German Prince Wilhelm Wied who governed it for less than one year. In 1914 the First World War has begun, during which the Albanian territory was transformed in battle ground, divided into pieces and invades by different states. After the World War in 1918 the most important aim of the Albanian political class was to rewind the independence and to assure the international recognition in Paris Conference of Piece in 1919.

The second phase starts from 1920 and it represents the first steps toward the creation of a political and juridical system. It ends in 1939 when the country was officially occupied by Italy.

### **Civil and Political Class Culture After Independence (1912-1920)**

After the declaration of the independence in November 1912, Albania was in a disaster situation from the social, economic and political point of view. Obviously the influence of the approximately 500 year invasion of the Ottoman Empire was the most remarkable.

The political system constructed by the Ottoman Empire' government was a primitive one, because it was based on the power of the army, the use of the force and not on the market mechanisms (Stamenova 2001, pp.217) and wealth.

From the political point of view the Ottoman Empire was supported by the big property owner's class whose interest was to keep their privileges in a primitive feudal system. The population was rural and the industrialization did not exist. The society was divided in two main parts: some few powerful families composed mostly by land owners, few commercial families and the second part consisted in free peasants, shepherd, soldiers, and workers that were following of their owners. The gap between the feudal families and the rest of the peasantry was enormous and the medium class did not exist.

Therefore in such primitive community, it was impossible to conceptualize something outside the individuality, or at least outside the dynasty, village and mountains (Frashëri 1997, pp.171). The rocky territory and the weak infrastructure, could not allow the concept of national idea among the population (Biberaj 2001, pp.30), that, was divided in different religious, local, language (dialects), traditions, folklore and moral laws (Koka V., et al., 2007, pp.17-18). In addition, because of the invasions, the population was concentrated basically on the mountains (Koka V., et al., 2007, pp.33) and totally isolated from each other.

During the occupation of the Ottoman Empire the class of big property owners' could enjoy some advantages because of the full autonomy that was recognized to them inside their properties. Nevertheless they lived in the middle of tensions, conflicts and misunderstanding between them.

Obviously under these social and historical conditions, the creation of a civil culture was not possible. The Ottoman occupation could create a unique mentality which consisted in a strong suspect to the political power and to the common civil life (Fischer 2004, pp.55). Consequently, the first sign of national and social movements started abroad, among the Albanian emigrations' community especially in the United States of America. Firstly these movements had national purposes for the independence after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. We can mention the publication of some newspapers like "Kombi" (the Nation), "Koha", "Lidhja", "Dielli" with the aim to promote the national interests. The association "Besa –Besën" was created in Boston with the purpose to open schools in Albania and to promote the national symbols. In 64 different cities of the United States were created different Albanian associations. The biggest one was "Vatra" under the direction of Fan Noli that was the result of the merging of some other associations. These associations undertook a considerable lobbying activity in the USA for the Albanian independence.

The political class was not appropriately prepared for quality steps toward the state building. From the analysis of the Declaration of Independence can be noticed poor concepts, forms and content (Krasniqi 2009, pp.15). Mostly the political class was educated abroad and some of them used to have some important political posts

during the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, it is understandable that most of them were part of the advantaged feudal class. However they could introduce some principles of democracy like the political representation, the separation of the state from the religious authorities (Koka, et al., pp.33). In conclusion the efforts for the modernization of the country couldn't be successful as the country was facing a lot of vital problems like the economic survival and the threats for the loss of the independence (Koka, et al., pp.34), and the First World War that started just two years after.

### **Civil Society and Political Class After the First World War**

The real modernization reforms started after the recognition of Albania from the Paris Peace Conference and the creation of the first real government. In the years 1922-1923 were built some elementary and high schools and some foreigner scholarships for higher education were distributed. However as a result of the reforms, in the years 1920-1924 the educational system could improve.. At the same time the Ministry of Education was established with the purpose to enforce the secularism and the nationalism. The education was supposed to be offered only by the government and not by any other religious or foreigner authority (Rama 2005, pp.15).

In addition, the society could improve. The feudal class diminished, and part of it was transformed in the public administration cast (Koka, et al. 2007, pp.117). Anyway the general disobedience of the population to the state authority has been a crucial problem in the society. Albanians were used to trust only "the powerful man" and never believed in the ideas or in the common good. Generally for the Albanians the only thing that's worth to fight for, was the defense of the tradition and honor (Vlora 2003, pp.460).

Albania is reach of natural resources, and some efforts have been undertaken for the industrialization of the country, but they haven't been enough for any considerable development of the economy. So the country couldn't reach any level of industrialization as happened in the other countries that could enjoy the consequences of the industrial revolution. Hence the absence of factories, and the development of the urban zones strongly penalized the development of the middle class and the modernization of the society (Meta 2003, pp.20).

The social movements organized in 1920-1930 mostly consisted in protests where the citizens were manifesting against the poverty and the unemployment. Except some associations like "Bashkimi" and "Atdheu" the rest were some spontaneous protests' activities with the purpose of ensuring some minimum surviving conditions. For the same purpose some trade unions were organized also in other cities of Albania (Meta 1999, pp. 47). As Vlora argues (2003: pp.484) the lower class was always ready to join the army for the defense of the territory if, but they

couldn't pretend to enjoy any right, as they didn't have any minimal political competence.

The political situation was extremely unstable. Because of the extreme conflicts between the interests of political groups, (Vlora 2002, pp.473) in 1920-1922 have been changed seven prime ministers (Fischer 2004, pp.52). Basically the political class was composed of components of high feudal class or from the administration. The Parliament was divided in two groups: the conservatives organized by the Popular Party and the Party of Development. The groups didn't have any ideology to support, or organizational structure. Both groups were frightening to get government's power. The Parliament was reflecting the unorganized, egoistic and backward society (Vlora 2003, pp.490). The extreme conflicts in the political arena produced the Revolution of June in 1923 where the Party of Development directed by F. Noli tried to build a democratic and modern state, that anyway never tried to organize free elections. Therefore it couldn't assure the recognition in the international arena.

The political class was operating in accordance to the philosophy "eliminate the opponent". Throughout the instrumentation of the Military Court, many politicians or anyway components against the regime were physically eliminated or imprisoned.

### **Common Elements Between Two Periods: Nation Building And Democracy Building**

As Guçe argues (2000: pp.121) the Ottoman Empire produced the "mundus vivendi" philosophy instead of the social contract. Therefore the everyday solutions with the invaders have been the foundation of every political activity of the political class. The popular political conscience has been always focused on the pragmatic way of thinking of surviving. Similarly the communist regime produced almost the same effects in the transitional period. In the communism époque the products and resources were extremely limited and equally distributed. In this way the society was marked by the concept "what I win, you lose" (Kornai 1985, pp.21). The lack of the surviving resources and the economic crises that followed the entrance in the free market, reduces the possibilities for the dominance of solidarity among the society. People became more and more individualistic and always looking to find alternative ways to avoid the legal authority. The disobedience to the state power is notable also in the nation building period. The beginning of the new era of democracy was realized mostly as an era against the communism. The solidarity and the common good idea were unappreciated as conceptualized hereditary from the past communism (Kajsiu 2004, pp.91).

At the other hand the absence of pluralism and the existing of a unique party produced the effect of the atomization of the society (Smamanova 2001, pp.221). Every person was directly connected with the state authority or the unique party and

there were no groups or associations between state and society. The passing from the centralized economy to the free market economy, caused ambiguity to the population that couldn't be certain anymore on their incomes. Therefore the identification of the groups in accordance to their interests was not easy since during the transition, the exchange of the interests between powerful economic groups and politicians was based on cooperation (Dumanova 2005, pp.69) and personal connections. The same consequence was produced by the feudal system in the nation building period where every person was connected only with the feudal who was the only recognized authority.

The political class has been recruited among the old class of politicians. The political identity was not clear. Also the ideological ideas and structural organization were ambiguous. The supremacy of the old class in politics is remarkable also in the nation building period where the components of the governments were mostly members of the big feudal families.

Among the political class is notable the role of the leader like the father in the family or like a despotic figure. The leaders of the political groups have a central role. They are like legends without which the party cannot exist (Bajraba 1999, pp.26). In fact the political arena has been dominated basically by the leaders of the main parties. The game between government and opposition is not significant because as soon as one political force is in opposition, it takes an irrelevant role in the legislative process. In conclusion it is evident the absence of tolerance and cooperation (Bajraba 1999, pp.32) and the theory of the exclusion. Similarly the same way of doing politics is noted in the nation building period because the relevant components of the opposition were physically eliminated. In addition the political arena was dominated by two leaders: Noli as the supporter of the democratization and modernization and Zog as the supporter of the old noble's class.

In Albania since the creation of the state, has never existed a democratic system, so there is no memory of the civil society. However this fact penalized the awakening of the civil community sense during the transitional period (Biberaj 2000, pp.35). At the same time when the democratization process started not enough attention was paid to the community and civil society (Paley 2000, pp.473). The international actors together with the local ones focused their efforts mostly on the most critical problems of democracy like: creation of democratic institutions, free and honest election and freedom. Some NOG's (non governmental organizations) were created with the help of the international institutions but they were supposed to be completely neutral to the government issues. The same lack of attention can be found in the nation building era, where the modernization reforms were focused mostly on the immediate needs of the country like the opening of the schools, the secularization and the enforcement of the economy.

## Conclusions

In this paper have been indicated some aspects of the civil society in Albania in two different periods of the history: the nation building (1912-1939) and the democracy building. Using the literature based research methodology we could find some common elements that have marked the civil and political culture in these two different periods. Also similar historical factors came out even we are treating two different periods of time.

Ottoman Empire established a forceful regime that strongly marked the Albanian society after the independence. In the same way the communist regime has obviously left some negative elements that root the Albanian society during the transition and democracy building.

Firstly, following the independence the political class did not have enough competences for the foundation of a modern state because in a community that haven't had schools or educational system for hundred years, can not exist a capable elite to govern. In the same way, the communist regime established an educational system inspired by the Marxism ideology where the principles of democracy and the free market could not be studied. In addition the old political leadership could survive: so after independence the political class was still composed by exponents of the feudal system, as in the first years of transition many exponents of the communism continued their activities as a result of self reformation.

Secondly the Ottoman period has produced a weak economy, without industrialization and urbanization where the resources have been always extremely limited. In the same way the communist regime was characterized by absence of goods. Both regimes have created the concept that "what I win, you lose". This philosophy deduce to the other aspect of the society: the absence of civil society, the absence of the sense of common good and trust.

In both periods are notices that the civil community is weak and insignificant and the modernizing reforms undertaken by government during the nation building, and international organization during the democracy building, couldn't be successful, because the country was facing some other relevant problems. Therefore, while the government was focused to the economic development reforms, creation of an educational system, public order, or insurance of the independence during nation building, in the transition the international actors were focused more on the establishment of democratic principles and free elections.

Another important finding is that in both periods have produced the sense of "trust to one person", not "trust to one idea". In post independence the individuals trusted only their padrone that could be the feud leader or a powerful man in the relative circle. Similarly the the communism produces the atomization of the society. People were connected directly to the state or to the unique party. Secondly the same effect is dominant among the political class.



In conclusions can be pointed out that the civil and political culture is transmitted from one generation to another. The actual scenarios of the political and civil arena are hereditary from the history of the Albanian state. After 20 years from the beginning of the transition, Albania has a strong institutional framework but still facing lots of problems of tolerance, of cooperation and of solidarity, which means that the institutions are oriented by the history.

The civil and political cultures are arguments that should be explored further and from different aspects. Conflicts are most dangerous among those societies who have not developed a trust rapport between their individuals. Democracy is hindered by the political culture that does not recognize the solidarity and institutional trust that push the society towards individual solutions based on disparity and not on meritocracy (Dahl 1987, pp.55). For these reasons it can be suggested to make other research on how to improve the civil society, the sense of the community, the sense of the reciprocity and of the common good, in order to transform the civil culture and to assure a better life for the future generations.

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