DEPOLITICIZATION* OF POLITICS AS A RESULT OF A CONFLICTING DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

In general, ideological labelling "left or right" of the electorate in Albania is often viewed symbolically connected to a party or a certain leader, rather than the doctrinal content of specific policies followed by a party. Several researchers, including Zechmeister (2001), Mair (1990), Lippman and Dalton (1993), referring to countries with brief history of political plurality, reach the conclusion that the ideology in these countries is often determined by the symbolic use of the terms "left" and "right" by the political actors (i.e. representatives of political parties) as well as by the reproduction of this symbolic in a higher degree by means of the media than by means of the doctrinal content of the political programs. Regarding the political behaviour in Albania, it is noticed that supporters of the two main parties, the DP and SP, consider themselves "left" or "right" simply because they identify themselves with the logo or the history of the party they adhere to, and do not analyse whether the programs or policies implemented by either party are left or right concerning their content from the doctrinal standpoint. In such a political reality, the role of the leader becomes crucial. The electorate is reduced to a mere audience, while politics is "depoliticised", becoming an arena of "war" between actors in individual levels. So, it is the form that overlaps the content and not the opposite.

KEYWORDS: Conflict, Discourse, Hegemony, Leadership, Doctrine, Personalization

INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that politics inseparable in terms of competition. In other words, “competition is like the root of the term politics”, when we designate the art of governance or when we refer to strategy and tactics to gain and keep power. Democracy means always two parties, two actors: the majority that intends to hold the power and the opposition that is the opponent and competes to take the power. Consequently, politics is not just an art or practice of governance, but also a competition (Meny, Y. & Surel, Y. 2002).
Semantics of political culture concept embodies best the trend of the politics that sometimes goes beyond competition and gets transformed into a conflict. This is a concept developed in the sixties, meaning beliefs, values and norms of how to organize social and economic life. Lijphart (1977) offers perhaps the most basic classification of political cultures: consensus versus conflict. According to him, we have a consensual culture when parties compete for the same values, but they are opposed to each other because they propose different approaches for their realization.

For many authors, confliction is regarded as the normal state of politics. It is worth mentioning representatives of the school of conflict theory (Dahrendorf, 1958, Collins, 1975), who believe in values and productivity of society thanks to the conflict. According to them, we often emphasize the “political consensus” rather than “political conflict”. We underestimate the fact that the citizen is ultimately interested in parliamentary debate and political objections, and not the opposite. Today, the idea that any political activity includes the possibility of criticism and debate prevails within the framework of the political thought. The debate between political forces in or outside parliament realizes that not only the political transparency, but also serves as an incentive to generate progressive ideas in society. Louis Wirth (1948), a representative of the Chicago school, argues that we are only one step away from exaggerated consensus to totalitarianism. Elaborating the idea of a truly democratic consensus, he underlines that in a democratic society the only acceptable consensus is that everyone agrees that there is no reason why we all should have common views and alternatives.

**DISCUSSIONS AND DEBATES**

During these years, the conflict between the political forces in the country, especially among majority and minority, has often turned into a common phenomenon. Therefore, it is not that clear whether we are dealing with the same crisis taking different forms or successive crises. This supposedly political conflict is considered responsible for delays and under-achievements of political parties, especially failure to find a consensus necessary for the most basic functions of democracy. However, it should be noted that in most cases the conflict between political forces has failed to rise to the level of a political conflict, as stated by the above authors. Referring to the content of the conflict in Albania, it results that unsubstantial and peripheral issues often become sources of conflict. Political communication process is mainly dominated not by clear projects or ideas, but by political accusations and rumors. For instance, one thing that easily comes to anyone’s mind is the discursive tendency that tries to
replace the dichotomy left/right with communist/anticommunist, reformer-conservative etc. This tendency which especially occurs before the elections, builds a debate without doctrinal essence. What should happen is the construction of a conceptual framework of dichotomy left/right based on certain paradigms such as profit/redistribution, market policies-social policies, private-public, equality-individualism etc. “The isotopy of this framework is: future, development. There is also a conceptual framework of dichotomy such as communist/anticommunist, collaborationist/antifascist, patriot/traitor, spies/prisoners, dossiers of the past/transparency etc. The isotopy of this framework is: past, conflict.” (Gjokutaj, 2012:10). Following this logic, “the other” is not just a political opponent, but an enemy, questioning his integrity and not considering the alternative he represents. In this mentality, Berisha has consistently named Fatos Nano “godfather of crime”, “head of a corrupted system”, “casino gambler”, “complicit in the drug trade”. In the other political camp, Nano has simultaneously played similar role, having the same mentality as his political opponent, calling Berisha “a great evil”, “last dictator”, “irreparable man” etc. The public has constantly been under the influence of anti berishism of Nano orantinoism of Berisha. Even the campaigns for parliamentary elections in the years 1996, 1997, 2001 and 2005 were designed on this basis. Thus, in it selectoral spots, the Democratic Party put forward the question: “Are you going to vote for a Prime Minister or a crime minter?” Meanwhile, in it selectoral spots, the Socialist Party emphasized the idea that Sali Berisha should be held responsible for the chaos of the year 1997 and 1998.

The same logic was also followed by the current Prime Minister Rama, who based his general election campaign of 2009 on Gërdeci tragedy and events of 1997 and 1998. Even in the 2011 local elections, he pursued the same electoral strategy. We can recall the slogans “It’s Sali’s fault”, “Never again”, “SaliGërdeci” etc. On the other hand, during the local elections of 2007 and 2009, Berisha attacked Rama by addressing allegations of his personal and family life. Generally, charges and counter charges dominate the most part of political discourse. Short sentences, insults, labeling, expressions of contempt, personal attacks, reference to participants’ personal moral values, small funny stories with ironic nuances for showing political attitudes, charges on personal relationships of party leaders with business circles etc., were topics of many debates, campaigns, press releases throughout this period.

“Political actors are unable to build a vision of society that is based on particular groups or social strata or to refer to an ideological universe, and they build a vision of society in function to a threat – symbolized by political opponents.” (Foster, 2010:29). In this theater,
the political opponent is considered as the negative character that does not allow the development of society. “In this kind of discourse, ‘two antagonists’ (socialists and democrats) create the idea for eliminating each other.”(Fuga, 2001:70). This affects not only the level of leadership, but all political actors. Under these conditions, the entire political communication is involved in a vortex where everyone is accused. This context shows high levels of polarization, confliction and exclusion in Albanian politics. “This phenomenon, for many scholars concerned with the analysis of discourse, to some extent is explained by the effects of totalitarian legacy, which continues to have an impact on how the opposing parties perceive each other. Despite the fact that we live in a different political system, the influence of the past seems to be inevitable.”(McGuican, 1992:135). For this reason, according to researchers Fuga (2001) and Tarifa (2009), many problems facing the Albanian society, are connected with the existence of a totally an mentality. This approach to political opponents, except the bipolar and conflictual climate, creates the idea of similarity between the parties which are supposed to be in diametrically opposite positions. Acting on the same logic, the parties cannot reach to differentiate themselves from one another. That is why members of the public often express in informal settings: “they are not better than the opposing party” or “both sides behave equally”. Once you criticize one party, its supporters will say to you that the other party is acting worse, and once you criticize the other party, its supporters will say that the opponents are even worse.

“In this context, social reality itself starts taking opposite values for rival social groups. Social meaning fails to establish an internal coherence. What is a truth for one social group is a fraud for the other. In fact it is society that has lost all of its internal cohesion. The risk for chaos and social stagnation is present more than ever.”(Gjokutaj, 2012:10). Precisely, some fundamental handicaps in post-communist politics derive from this specific way of discourse of the two main political forces. When people are articulated in relation to a threat symbolizing a political opponent, political conflict becomes extremely tough and uncompromising. Personalization generally dominates this discourse. The leader’s name becomes the target around which a heterogeneous reality is homogenized. Every political party strongly supports its leader and harshly attacks the political opponent. Therefore, two poles dominate the field of discourse, excluding the existence of other poles.”(Held, J. 1996). Structuration of political conflict – not as a competition of programs, alternatives etc, but as a duel between persons – makes the news look like an artistic creation, with nuances of the conventions of critical realism. Our reporters go even further: leaders’ duels are often
portrayed as mythic battles. For instance, there are reports of electoral campaigns where Berisha, although in front of Berati militants, addressed provocatively to the opposition leader, as Rama was there with “shield” and “harness”: “Hey EdvinRama, you are accusing me without facts and are only fabricating stories. You are accusing 20 thousand commissioners... I guarantee you that on the 8th of May we are going to win in Tirana and Berat…” (Berisha, 2010:2). Or, we can refer to Rama’s tirades on Twitter, using the same technique: “What are you talking about, Sali, who are those poor …” In fact, the author is addressing to his Twitter virtual friends, and not the real enemy. “Such situations can also be identified as individual discourses: leaders want to raise the emotional temperature of supporters. That is why they use this rhetoric form, even though this is an archaic and populist approach.” (Gjokutaj, 2012:10). This tendency makes the discursive content problematic. Generalized terms without doctrinal content dominate speeches, press releases and campaigns.

CONCLUSION

We come across a problem related to instrumentalization of language in terms of ideological structure as terminologies, linguistic categories and concepts used in the debates, political rallies or our discussions do not guarantee the changes and doctrinal differences. In fact, they only ignite the elimination of these changes and doctrinal differences. This discourse is based on generalized categories that cause uniformity – not any variation, similarity—not any change. This discursive pattern aims to eliminate the differences in order to achieve consensus as soon as possible, and what is most important, the majority often abuses the rights for political, economic, cultural or religious minorities. The mobilization of social groups is not realized through the articulation of their interests, but the threat posed by the adversary.

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