

A generation caught between two eras - The drastic shift from communism to capitalism in Albania.

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Abstract

The year 1945 marks the beginning of the darkest era in the history of the Albanian people. At a time where Europe had just come out of the Second World War, in a state of huge destruction and grief, with little attention towards the smaller states, communism was established in Albania, followed by unprecedented violence, unconstitutional trials, deportations, persecutions, overall paranoia and a nationalist hysteria. Enver Hoxha became the undisputable political and social leader of the country, implementing a doctrine of aggression, national isolation and espionage. The economy switched from private to state collective, so the people were expropriated. The elite of the society, which was a threat to the new regime, were mostly persecuted, after being put through ridiculous trials, or even without being tried, many were jailed, executed or tortured to death.

The long period of Enver Hoxha's governing, (1945-1985), was marked by a massive manipulation of people's minds and fates. People lived in terror and under a continuous pressure of espionage from the state security. The regime built a doctrine of "biography", according to which people were judged by origins and the fates of many were settled or cursed by a rebellious father, brother, or even distant relative. It would take the death of a dictator (Hoxha), and a massive popular rebellion, protests and the rise of the students in demonstrations, for the trigger of the first state negotiations. The aim of this work is to bring to light once again, the struggle of the Albanian people through the dictatorship and also those following the fall of it. The remarkable influence of this era and the beginning of democracy, the huge gap between the ideologies and the attempts of the people to adapt to the new regime.

Key words: *communism, terror, espionage, isolation, persecution, capitalism.*

1. Introduction

The years 1944-1945, found Europe in a state of devastation, as a result of the Second World War, which produced millions of homeless people, a collapsed economy, huge damages to the industry and infrastructure, not to mention the number of lives lost during the war and in concentration camps and the overall hysteria towards the Jewish people. Under these conditions, the attention of the powerful European states which had to recover from one of the most destructive wars in human history, was fully concentrated on the reconstruction and rehabilitation of their economy, not onto the small states, like Albania, which had been mainly used for diplomatic purposes, and to satisfy the needs of the major states in the Balkans, Northern and Southern Europe. Albania itself was in a continuous state of turmoil. The country was drastically divided. On one side, the people were divided by religious beliefs, the south was mainly Muslim, under the influence of the Osman Empire, while the north was mainly Catholic. The political events from the Declaration of Independence in 1912, following the fragile government of Ismail Qemali, the proclaimer of the Albanian independence and the

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founder of the official Albanian State, were dynamic, but fractionized. With Albania being declared independent and a Republic, the most outstanding personalities of the country tried to gather forces and set their position in the governing of the country.

2. Communist Albania

The political developments of the years 1944-1945, together with the weakening of the European influence over Albania, created the best conditions for one of the national forces that was dominating the country, to come to power. The leader of this force, Enver Hoxha, taking advantage of the political and ideological differences all over the country, managed that in a very short period of time, an expansion of his influence on the vast majority of the Albanian territory. The people, already tired of the continuous turmoil and instability that prevailed in the country, saw in this new political force, some sort of hope and the first sparkles of an organization on a state level, since king Zog I period, hopes that would soon fade, immediately after the establishment of the most cruel regime that the Albanian people would ever experience.

As soon as the new Prime Minister came to office, took special care for the solution of two major issues that could threaten the stability and legitimacy of his government, first, the elimination of the political opponents, a campaign that had already begun during the war, and the second issue, the recognition of his government on an international scale and at the same time, the specification of the line to follow in foreign affairs. The elimination of the political opponents did not apply any type of exception. The establishment of the new government was accompanied since the beginning with numerous detentions, deportations and also many executions. These people were charged with crimes of all kinds, the most serious of which were high treason and cooperation with the enemy. Obviously, these accusation were never proven, and even when the accused were put before a body of judges, who were indoctrinated up to their cells, they were always found guilty, and then were sentenced to death or to numerous years in jail. The less lucky ones, were not even trialed. The communist security forces took them from their homes, and then their families would never come to see them again. The communist violence didn't spare anyone, not even women. Thus, the unprecedented violence generated what Hoxha had expected it to generate: a people terrorized to death and a drastic fall in the number of political opponents, which was translated into unlimited political power of the party in office. When it comes to foreign policy, Europe was a thread towards the totalitarian visions of the new government, and on these grounds, the political allies of the regime were the Soviet Union and the far China.

Under the shadow of a pseudo socialist ideology, the new government erased the concept of private property, by converting into state and collective, each portion of the Albanian territory and by confiscating (sometimes in the shape of taxation) the wealth of the Albanian people. Thus, the Albanian people were ripped from their properties, and soon became so poor, that even clothes or other commodities were limited in amount and difficult to find. Often, they had to organize and engage in unpaid job campaigns, through which have been built the major buildings and facilities in the country, such as railways, prisons, agricultural plantations, bunkers etc. The heavy industry was another

wound of the Albanian society, since the people suffered of poor nutrition, and especially with the introduction of the ideology of the daily norm (objective to be achieved at work per worker), a normal working day was an exhaustion for the worker. In many occasions, in the heavy industry were used the prisoners, whose work was obviously unpaid as well.

Another outstanding element of the dictatorship, was the regional discrimination North-South, that has taken place for years. The Northern regions have been discriminated in terms of education, and also in terms of proportional involvement in the government. For many centuries, the nobles of the north had contributed to the resistance to the Ottoman Empire and to the preserve Albanian language, culture and traditions, but in forty five years of communism, there regions were left behind. The study rights and scholarships were mainly distributed in the south. The Toske (southern) dialect became dominant over the Gege (northern) dialect, a hegemony that still prevails today, since the nowadays Standard Albanian Language is heavily influenced by the southern dialect. These details created some divisions and discrimination among the two regions, discrimination which is still present today.

In order to guarantee the stability of its power, the new government built a structure known as the State Security. This structure recruited individuals that would be noted for their intelligence and were infiltrated in the ideology of the regime. These individuals would give up their true identity, and dedicated their lives to a specialized activity of espionage, and were not only the most loyal servants of the regime, but also its ears and eyes. The first shadow of any doubt would cause the opening of a secret file, and the suspect would become subject of a secret investigation. These files were the basis of the investigation of the population and in many cases they were the basis on which many people were judged and condemned. It is believed that there exist hundreds of these files. Such a file was also opened for King Zog I, the main opponent of the communist government, although he spent the rest of his days in exile, where he also died. In a very short period of time, this structure became the nightmare of each Albanian citizen. The people started to live under the fear of their own thoughts, since a very fade sparkle of a doubt, could lead to fatal consequences. The communist regime, did not limit itself only on individual level, people were sometimes persecuted because they had family or relatives that had opposed the regime or had tried to leave the country. For this reason, the people did not fear only their lives, but those of their families as well.

As regards the foreign policy, the contact of Albania with the world during the dictatorship has been very limited, except for the allies. The country was put into total isolation. The state was surrounded by high security borders. The unauthorized passing of the border was forbidden and whoever tried to cross it was executed onsite. The only and a little safer means of escape were the lakes Ohrid and Struga. Of course there have been many attempts of people trying to cross to the other side (Macedonia) by swim. The regime was so suppressing that the idea to cross the whole lake swimming sounded safer than life in Albania. Besides the strengthening of the borders, the regime took care to build a denigrating ideology towards European countries, and the world in general. Although it has never been proved, it is thought that the mass construction of bunkers, would suit the ideology of hostility and protection from this “hostile” countries, a pseudo symbol of protection, from a war that was expected to start at any time, but that

actually never took place. Of course, the ideology once again proved to be successful. Today Albania counts over 700.000 bunkers all over its territory, a very high economic cost for a poor country like Albania.

In this way, Hoxha constructed the perfect type of dictatorship, by taking control of each aspect of the social, political and economic life in the country. This dictatorship had a very high cost for the Albanian people. The highest negative balance regards the elimination of the political opponents, which were not more and not less than the intellectual elite of the Albania society, academics, writers, nobles, students who had studied at the best universities in Europe, ex officials of the Ottoman administration who had a rich background in administration, teachers, and many others, whose intellectual contribution to the country would have been priceless. The ideals of these people faded in the jails and detention camps they were sent to. These people ended their days by doing the most vulgar works. The survivors of these jails have left terrifying testimonies, the tortures they have gone through are unimaginable. Another tragic balance of the communist days is the alteration of the value of the individual. In this system, the future of the individual was not determined by his own will and efforts, but from other totally irrelevant factors, such as origin, the history of his family, or other. The economical cost has been devastating as well. For one reason or another, the communist regime set the heavy industry as a priority, while the people were hungry, since most of the agricultural and food products were exported. For many years, the food was in scarcity and distributed in portions, and obviously obesity was an unknown phenomenon.

Although one of the harshest regimes ever experienced by the Albanian people, the years of the dictatorship had some positive aspects, although when compared to the negative ones are almost inconsiderable. During the years of the communist regime, the people were well organized. There was a well-defined social structure and the people were mainly calm and peaceful. The regime built railways and improved the urban and rural infrastructure. Agriculture was organized on a state level into cooperatives. Life in the cities and villages was dynamic and the natural resources were well exploited. If the settlement of communism in Albania didn't have to use the violent means that it actually did, the society of that time would be the perfect example of a perfect proletarian socialist society. Instead, the other side of that "harmony" were the sufferings and the tortures of the people who never agreed with the regime, who gave their lives, or most of their years, because they wanted Albania to be a free and European country.

3. The 1990s – a Turning Point

The communist regime in Albania lasted from 1944 to 1989, almost 45 years and its traces will remain in the country for many other years to come. The death of the dictator Hoxha marks the beginning of the fall of the regime, although it would take some 5 more years for the winds of democracy to start blowing towards the Albanian mountains and fields. The heavy shadow of the dictator, no longer weighed in the lives, thoughts and psychology of the people. That's why the student's demonstrations that took place around the 1990s were massively supported by the people, who went out in the streets. The protests culminated with the demolition of the massive bust of the dictator,

which marks maybe the second most important moment in the history of the twentieth century, after the declaration of the Independence in 1912. The dark era had finally come to an end and had already become history.

4. The First steps towards a new era

Communism in Albania was overthrown almost violently, just like it had initially started. The country was seeking urgently the creation of a new post-communist government. The challenges ahead were huge. The long term isolation of the country had left Albania in a state of total economic and technologic delay compared to the neighboring and other more developed countries, who had made great progress since the Second World War. During communist years, as a result of the economic collectivism, the Albanian people ended up poor and expropriated, but the introduction of the new system, created new spaces for coming out of the economic ideology inherited by dictatorship days. The weakening of the communist state in general, was also reflected in the weakening of the security in the customs and in the ports in general. As a direct consequence of this, the Albania society experienced one of the most massive exodus of people travelling towards the missed opportunities, towards the unknown Europe. Of course, the first to leave were those onto whom communism had weighed the most. Once again, Albania lost a great deal of the elite of her youngsters and intellectuals. Many of the immigrants didn't manage to touch their European dream, and some don't even have tomb. The general political and economic situation was troubled and still unclear. With regard to the economical aspect, it was needed a smooth way for switching from state property to private. Of course this would result in a long and complicated process, and to be honest, there was some lack of economic expertise for the successful fulfillment of this process. The same phenomenon was felt even in the judicial and political aspect. Since the changes took place in very few years, many judicial and political gaps came to light. The fading of the communist ideology opened the way to the cooperation with European countries, although the gap between post-communist Albania and the rest of the world was relatively big, thus the integration turned out to be a very exhausting process.

The communist era has manipulated the minds of the Albanian people to incredible levels. Communism in Albania can be described as a real life economic, politic and social stage theater. The numbers used to mark the supposed increase in wealth were almost always false, just like the human values emphasized at that time. The ideological manipulation had reached all the aspects of life, literature, arts, music, teaching, family, work etc. Finding itself in front of a freedom that it was not ready for, the Albanian people took advantage of all means, be them legal or not, to escape once and for all the economic limitations that characterized communist years. The people tried to make up for the lost years, and that, added to the ready-made examples of easy money, many illegal activities began to emerge, the worse of which was the trafficking of human beings.

The second decade after the fall of communism was a little more stable. Maybe due to a natural human instinct to adapt, the Albanian state began to take the shape of a modern state. The politics began to operate on a multi-party system, while during communist

years, there was no such thing as a political opposition. This marks an important step forward towards the rise of the value of the free vote and the involvement of the people in the governing of the country. Of the same major importance was the borrowing and the adaption of the European judicial models. The review and enrichment of guide books of the basis of legislation in Albania, starting from the Constitution, the Civil and Penal Code and their respective Procedures, mark another step of progress in the judicial field. Thus, in a very short period of time, basically less than 20 years, the Albanian state, resembled very little that of communist days. Other significant changes were implemented in the education system, in which, as part of the modernization process, new textbooks were introduced, as well as new teaching methods, which, altogether combined with the rise of the quotas of acceptance in Universities, brought education to a new level. The establishment of the new economic and political relations with different countries in the world, created new economic spaces. It is worth to mention also the great contribution of immigrants who have invested most of their earning in their country.

Conclusions:

The highest weight of the shift from communism into democracy, has been ideological and psychological. This shift, which resembled more of a revolution than natural evolution, created a huge gap amongst generations with regard the general concept on life. The generation comprising the middle age and third age, was very fond of communist values, such as collective economy, patriarchal family and marriage at a young age and many others, while the youth, due to the dynamics that characterizes their age, embraced the new modern values more easily. Their central interest shifted from the creation of a family, to getting a better education, and into the improvement of themselves as individuals. These incongruences are still present today, especially in distant areas, where modernization takes more time to arrive.

Obviously, the loss in cultural values, historical and religious heritage that the Albanian people have suffered in 45 years of dictatorship is considerable, and the darkest part is impunity. This means that the files where there are preserved the records of 45 years of tortures, deportations and executions, are still closed and the violators, ironically, are rooted in names of streets, schools and other institutions. But it is a matter of fact, that the Albanian people, little as it may be, has given its contribution to the stability in the region, and it is a survivor, and will preserve the values and the integrity that has inherited from its autochthonous Illyrian predecessors.

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