



## Political Culture as a Determinant Factor in the Performance of the Public Sector in Albania

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### Abstract

*The successful implementation of reforms in public institutions is crucial for a country's progress. The achievement of these reforms always depends on various factors. One of the most important ones to be considered while evaluating the fulfillment of a reform is culture and mainly the political culture. Culture itself is a wide concept, yet, authors have tried to give several definitions to it. Nowadays, several authors are trying to connect the concept of culture to the nations' "performance" in fields like economy, public sector etc. Reforms in the public institutions are mainly needed in those countries that experience transitional political regimes. Albania has changed its political regime since the early 90s, however the reforms on its public institutions have been quite slow, even though some obvious progress has been made in the 30 years after the fall of communism. Therefore, this study aims to focus in the role of the political culture of the Albanian society in the performance of the public sector in this country. This study will analyze the concept of political culture by focusing in the characteristics of individual vs collectivist societies and the society's attitude towards politics and governance, therefore the political culture concept will be used to explain the behavior of the Albanian society towards the "efficiency and effectiveness" of its public institutions.*

**Keywords:** culture, public sector, Albania, political culture

### 1. Introduction

The reform of public institutions is crucial in states with transitional political regimes. Albania in 1990 went from dictatorial regime to the democratic regime [obviously, it is quite impossible to talk for a consolidated democracy in this period]. The transition was obviously chaotic. Society experienced chaotic developments. Economy was ruined. Politics was also uncertain. Public institutions, as a crucial part of the executive power, were also experiencing one of the most troubled period in the Albanian's state history. (see more: Abrahams 1996) As it occurs in such states, reforms of the public sector are considerably needed in order to reform and restore the respect of the Fundamental Human Rights.

Since 1990, various reforms were implemented in the Albanian public sector, yet other reforms are aimed to be achieved in the near future. Nevertheless, various issues are an obstacle for achieving the needed public reforms and a good overall performance of the public sector in the country. Culture is one of these obstacles. Many authors have discussed the role of culture in shaping the public institutions and its role in the latter's performance. For this reason, this study aims to analyze the influence of the Albanian society's political culture in "the efficiency and effectiveness" of its public institutions.

Despite the progress that Albania has made throughout the years, there still persist several problems in the public sector which make it difficult to operate in a system of meritocracy and democracy. During these years, since the fall of communism, the country has been and is still examined by the "international actors". In its path towards European Integration, Albania has been evaluated and supported to overcome its problems in the public sector through various

funds and loans. Nevertheless, there are still many anomalies. The fact the the European Union is neglecting to approve the start of the first intergovernmental conference with Albania, does not only mean that the European Union is in an uncertain moment of its existence, but it also means that the country needs to fulfill other criteria in order to be ready for the negotiation process in the EU. The last report of the European Commission admits the progress that the country has made, but it also declares in most of the criteria that the progress has been *moderate*. (Progress Report 2020)

Therefore, considering the 30 years of political transition and the fact that Albania does not have a consolidated democracy, this article aims to focus in the role that the Albanian society's political culture has in the "performance" of the public institutions of the country, since the latter are essential for a state; therefore, they are supposed to operate according to democratic principles. In this context, this study will analyze the historical background of "the supply and demand of institutions", as Fukuyama would say (2013), in the aftermath of dictatorial regime for the Albanian context. After this analysis, there will be a modest comparison between the findings of the European Commission from year 2005 to the last progress report of 2020, in order to measure the achievements of Albania in regards to the public sector. Subsequently, the concept of culture and political culture discussed by various authors will be integrated into the Albanian context, in order to show that the slow progress of the country's public sector is due to several factors like its society's cultural aspects mainly due to strong family ties, beliefs and attitudes of the political leaders and the overall lack of faith of the society that phenomena can change even in the Albanian context in order to grant further progress.

## 2. Challenges of the Albanian Public Sector since 1990

Albania experienced a difficult political transition after 1990. It was one of the most unstable countries which underwent in such situations. (see also: Abrahams 1996) The society was considerably collectivist during communism, since everyone was equal in terms of goods, manners, ideas, patterns of behaviors. Therefore, democracy brought several clashes due to the fact that it was a new system of politics and ideology, which sought to influence every individual, as well. This political system abruptly influenced Albanians. One of the main slogans of democracy is that every one has equal opportunities to participate in the state, society, community and so on. Consequently, the change from communism to democracy itself brings a transition from a collectivist to an individualist society. The transition from one type of the society to the other differs from country to country.

Despite the political transition, culture is not an easily transformed element in societies. As Fukuyama says the Asian countries survived and ameliorated due to their pattern of behavior towards public administration. (2013) China, for example, was the first country to introduce the civil service examination for those who wanted to enter the public administration since early medieval years. Nowadays, the political system of China has the attention of other countries and personalities, although debate still exists in relation to the respect of human rights in this country. Roland says that if the state will continue to control the right to access to the internet, this fact might slow the economic development of the country. (2004: 20) However, the economic success of China is still "in process" due to the latest geopolitical developments after the last pandemic.

On the other hand, referring to the Albanian context, the uncertainties in this country after 1990 brought many consequences. Regarding the public administration, corruption and political appointment, instead of fair recruiting process in the public sector, were some of the main problems that influenced the public institutions and the overall public sector. Citizens, in order to achieve public services faster, tried the easiest way of corrupting civil servants. As it often occurs in transitional regimes, human rights denial are the biggest concern.

Together with the corruption, also considering the fact that Albanians came from a strongly collectivist society, public administration and its respective institutions became subject to these new changes. The job at the public institutions was considered as one of the most preferred, therefore individuals sought to ask for recommendations for themselves, their relatives and so on, in order to get a job in the public sector. Recruiting without a fair process was one of the main problems. Even though, nowadays this issue might still be present, there have been made several reforms regarding the employment in the public administration, through the online platforms, for different professions, or even the excellent students of universities, in the context of the amelioration of e-governance of the country.

In the context of public services, another part of the public institutions which "suffered" from this new changes since 1990 was the justice system. The individuals who were part of a trial, tried to give money to the judges in order to get a legal decision in their favor. By doing so, the poorer could not find justice. They consequently became a factor of further injustices.

Koxhaj explains that the corruption takes place wherever the administrative policies are hidden from the public opinion, when the opposite and media are pessimistic from the corruptive activities, and when the political party in power

influences the public administration. (Koxhaj 2002: 243) Being in a corruptive context will therefore mean that public institutions are weak, the legal framework is incomplete and the civil society is almost inexistent, while there is also a lack of capacity in adapting and creating proper laws and policies for the society. (Koxhaj 2002: 254)

There are several measures which can be taken in order to reduce corruption. First of all, there are the cultural aspects that should be taken into consideration, i.e. the belief and the attitudes of the political elite and the respective actors should behave according to the values and principles that help in reducing corruptive practices. However, if we consider the Albanian example, the difficulty of the reduction of corruption might come from the fact that the political parties stay on power for a relatively long term [a minimum of 8 years since 1991, which means that the probability to engage in corruptive actions is higher, because Albanians are not totally disconnected from the collective society's aspects like family or friendship ties].

In countries where the political parties stay in power for a short time, i.e. one mandate or less, there is less probability that the public institutions will be involved in corruption. (see more: Koxhaj 2002: 263) In these countries, the political culture is obviously participant. (Almond and Verba 1989) Therefore, the society is more aware in moving towards anti-corruptive actions.

### 3. Albania and its road to the European Integration- an institutional "measurement"

Since 1991, Albanian political actors have been discussing about the country's road to European union. The itinerary of the European integration has been as an instrument of measurement for the country's progress towards democracy. However, Albania is following a long road to the European integration since the country hasn't yet opened the negotiations process. In the progress report of the European Commission, the public administration, i.e. public institutions as well, have received a considerable attention.

In 2005, Albania has received some recognition of its progress. However, there is stated that "Public administration reform and the strengthening of civil society had also seen some progress, but the report concluded that more determination and political will was necessary to ensure further improvement." (Progress Report 2005) Furthermore, Albania during this period of evaluation was still weak, with major problems dominating as the corruption and organized crime. In this period, the European Union supported Albania through the CARDS assistance.

One of the pillars of this financial support was "Good governance and Institution Building" which amounted at 26.6 million euro, in order to support the judicial reform, state police in various missions, and to build public administration capacity with funds up to 4.3 million euros, in order to focusing to decentralization, customs and taxation. (Progress report 2005) Furthermore, Albania became part of the macro-financial assistance from the European Union in 2005. This loan aimed to support public finance management, the functioning of the public administration and the fight against corruption, and progress in financial sector reform. Albania in this time was ready for the disbursement of the first instalment. (Progress report 2005) In 2005 the public administration in Albania was notably influenced by "political appointments". (Progress report 2005) Meanwhile, in the last progress report, the public administration is evaluated for its achievements in policy-making process. (Progress report 2020: 5)

One of the weakest points that still persists in the evaluation of Progress Report 2020 is the Public Internal Financial Control policy and the coordination of its implementation with the ongoing public administration and public finance management reform. (Progress report 2020: 8) In the last report, the authorities also denote that "the government should allocate more human and financial resources to EU accession work and put more emphasis on coherent and targeted domestic communication of EU matter", since the public administration is considered to lack capacity and resources, which also impacts the capacity to plan, implement and monitor public policies. (Progress report 2020: 12)

In its path to the European Integration, Albania has received abundant support from these international actors, yet, various problems still continue in the management of public sector. For what regards the financial context, the country is still facing problems in term of transparency and adequate management, as it is declared in the last progress report from the European Commission.

### 4. Political Culture as a Determinant Factor in the Public Sector

Political Culture is a determinant factor in the public institutions' performance. Almond and Verba defined the political culture as the "political orientations- attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system... as we can speak of an economic culture or a religious culture." (1989: 12) Almond and Verba classify three types of political culture. The first of them is the parochial political culture. The second is the subject

political culture and the third is the participant political culture. The first type of political culture refers to the religious norms by which society is bound off and does not change, because it only chooses to obey to the authority, as religioners do; while, the society in this case, does not ask for any changes by the political actors. The second type of culture is the subject political culture, in which the individual exists and is aware of the political authority, but s/he does not intervene with "the political system". The third political culture is the participant political culture, in which the individual acts notably within "the political system". (Almond and Verba 1989: 16-19)

Albania in the early 1990 was obviously bound by the parochial political type of culture, while since then up to nowadays, the society is more bound by the subject political culture. In the third type of political culture according to Almond and Verba, the population participates in the country's politics. In Albania, it is not possible to admit that the society belongs to the third type of political culture since even the political parties who govern the country stay in power for relatively long mandate. Therefore, from this view, it is deduced that Albanians as a society do not belong to the participant political culture since changes in politics and other bodies of the government rarely happen.

Guiso, Sapienza and Zingales define culture as those customary beliefs and values that society transmits "fairly unchanged" from generation to generation. (2006: 23) Referring to this definition, we can understand that it is impossible to suddenly change all the cultural patterns by which the Albanian society is influenced. Fukuyama also states that history and culture influences institution and "predicts" the future of institutions after "a certain conflict", as it occurred with Germany and Japan in the aftermath of the Second World War, in which both countries grieved many losses, yet nowadays they are two of the most stable countries nowadays. (2013: 71)

In contrast, Acemoglu and Robinson (2019) state that institutions and their history together with the political leaders' beliefs are more determinant than culture itself in the prosperity of a certain country. (2019: 77-85) These authors mention the example of China after the Second World War, by stating that "the poverty during Mao's governance was not due to the Chinese culture, but it was due to the way he organized and planned his actions". (2019: 84) They also state that it depends on two types of public institutions: *inclusive* or *extractive*. The first type of institutions encourages the economic development due to the centralization of power and the willingness to support economic growth for the mass, while the second type of institutions put an obstacle to the economic growth, since they give the possibility of benefits only to a small elite. (2019: 102-111)

In Albania, during the 90s, the society suffered from the existence of extractive public institutions, if we consider the overall situation of the country. Therefore, it was impossible to see economic growth amid the turmoil of those years, in which a civil war broke up [1997]. This fact explains not only the lack of preparedness of the Albanian institutions to take control over the country, but it also can be found in some cultural and psychological grounds of the society, due to the harsh political developments like the change of regimes and the inability of the political actors to properly govern the country. Furthermore, since the early 90s, Albania benefited from the international financial help in terms of loans, grants, and other funds. However, yet in the last progress report of the European Commission the country is deemed not ready in what regards the administration of the financial issues in the public sector, which means that the allocation of funds still needs to overcome anomalies, due to various factors from the individual culture to the political actors' resistance. (see more: Public Report 2020)

## 5. Conclusions

Culture is a determinant factor for what regards the performance of public institutions in Albania, as well. Despite the harsh political transition, the country received considerable financial, political and technical support from the international actors, especially the European Union. If we use as a measurement the evaluation of the European Commission, Albania has not made the adequate progress throughout the years considering the fact that the dictatorial regime felt more than 30 years ago. The country is not ready to open the negotiation process with the European Union. Therefore, considering the patterns of the Albanian society, which came from a collectivist background, with strong family and friendship ties, it is notably difficult for the Albanians to accept the characteristics of an individual society, in which the law prevails, and is equally respected by everyone [except particular cases within these political systems].

Culture in its wide definition and especially the political culture of a society strongly influences the way that the public sector performs. Even if some authors may argue that it is the institutional history of a country that determines its public sector's future perspective, however, this historical background is constructed upon cultural elements.

Culture is not an easily transferred element from several actors to other ones. Therefore, it will take other years for the Albanian context to change, in this perspective. In order to achieve faster changes, probably the political actors in the country need to show the proper readiness in establishing the right public institutions, in order to make further progress in

the performance of the country's public sector.

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