

THE PROCESS OF DEMOCRATIZATION AND ROLE OF ELITES IN ALBANIA		Political Science Keywords: Paradigms, Albania, democratic consolidation, political elites, mutual pacts, democratic values, competitive authoritarianism, backsliding of democracy.
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Abstract

Democratic consolidation in Albania should not only be analyzed from a prospective of regime durability. The paradigms of democratization should be focusing on significant democratic contents. The main goal of this work is to investigate democratic consolidation process during last two decades. This will be conducted through a qualitative case study where the method employed, is on the realm of theory consuming. In order to achieve the purpose, this work will raise the questions of, why Albania did not reach democratic consolidation so far? What were the main challenges for further democratic consolidation? I will try to explore a few aspects of democratic consolidation in Albania, in terms of strength of democratic values represented by the ruling elites. Under this assumption, strong and reliable elite’s decision-making are important in explaining the consolidation of democracies but not sufficient to guarantee consolidation. Separated, fragmented and conflictive ruling elite may stop democratic consolidation and alter the process. In addressing these inquiries, certain paradoxes recognized in this case are unparalleled in other contexts that involve elites’ attributes to the process of consolidation. Elongated transition in Albanian has only produced an ongoing crisis and the elites seem to have constantly failing to produce a strong pathway for consolidation. Political elites have shown authoritarian tendencies into monopolization of power. This is analyzed as a main constraint of democratic consolidation in Albania. In this case can be assumed, due to vanishing allegiances of political elites to democratic values, that democratization process will be characterized by, backsliding into facade democracies or competitive authoritarianism.

1. Political Background

Albania is an exceptional case study for exploring democratic consolidation as the country has a unique political history. This means that the county's history during the last decades consists of various government transitions from autocratic to democratic and yet losing the democratic quality, thus it failed to consolidate the democracy. One of the key elements was the creation of political pluralism and the private sector. Another key element is a wide desire and popular vocation about achieving democratic consolidation and economic prosperity. It is almost taken as face value among the general population as a single destination for which Albanians are craving for a long time, side by side with implementing a high and steady market economy with western standards. Under the frame of such conditions, it was necessary to build up the ruling political elites to guide the Albanian society toward liberal western democracies. Such a process is carried out through the period of so-called transition from autocracy to democracy and further to democratic consolidation. It is important to notice that if a society is not run by its best elite, it remains trapped in transition, and will fail to apprehend the institutional functioning, also achieve free elections to facilitate the elite circulation.

On the other hand, democracy has long been considered relevant only in countries with consolidated democracies. This is because a nonviolent and agreeable society is a precondition of

a functioning democracy. Democracy is achievable in a country where the voters are mainly satisfied with the performance of their government. Under this assumption, Albanian society had to be guided by intellectual elites, and with the assistance of western allies to set a secure path to western models. The ruling political elites fitted and forged ideological with the past communist doctrine, and they had lost legitimacy among people (Fischer, J. Bernd. 2012). The solution was to bring up forth intellectuals from different academic and social areas. Presumably, with the assistance of western democratic allies, these elites would facilitate the transition and would guide the society through the difficult period of transition(Alexander, G.2002).But the result is that the society has been for a long time unmanaged by the political class that came to power after the collapse of communism which could not normally operationalize the institutional functioning to a democratic standard, and due to this mismanagement, has produced inefficient institutions. Completely wrong implementation and choice of economic reforms did create a chaotic economy and ambiguity among economic operators. This chaos introduced a high level of informality, corruption, and weak governmental finances. Such a situation did not allow much foreign capital investment and it resulted in continuous workforce emigration (Miranda Vickers, 2007). In terms of government, this process had led to a high politicization of the state apparatus and produced domestic problems. Such domestic problems were detrimental for the process of transition because it led to a lack of circulation of political elites, also the threat of old ideas and ideologies such as communism were still in place. Asymmetrical power-sharing relationship between the executive and two other branches of the check and balance system led to the assimilation of power by the very few elite or political actors. It led to the projection of individual autocracy and the institution of individual cult in the political culture. Thus far in 1996-97, it was unable to achieve civic society control, and general election led to a feeble superficial democracy (Krasniqi, A, and Hackaj, A, 2013). Unfortunately, after this election, the involvement of the intellectual elite in political life was reduced, civic society was almost inexistent and due to economic failure because of pyramidal schemes, an outbreak of armed conflict, and civic unrest, the democracy in Albania did backslide to authoritarian political decision making. This was a major downfall in the transition to democracy and market economy (Abrahams, C, and Freed 2015). It is worth noting that consolidation of democracy is not necessarily directly link to economic prosperity. But in the Albanian case, challenges all possible theories and would encounter several troubling paradoxes in the context of these theories of political and economic transition (Krasniqi, A, and Hackaj, A, 2013)

Analysis and criticism of the political and social situation of this period are addressed toward the political class as the main actor to blame for such failure. This failure left enough room for some political leaders to create the model of party single leadership, an element that distorted the functioning of political parties, institutions, which were guaranteed by the constitution, thus damaging the foundation of a democratic state. This created among the population apathy toward the intolerant political class, and a deep climate of disbelief and indifference to political debate, since no one believed in the ruling reflecting on the idea that no one wanted chaos and tragic breakdown of the political and economic system any more. The enthusiasm and popular demand

for democracy, during the year 1997 after the civil unrest, yet was threatened by the deep climate of disbelief, fierce political debate, harsh rhetoric, and verbal conflicts. The elections during this time did not aim to change the political system but to rotate political power. They aimed to end the severe political and social crisis, as well as to bring about political and economic stability. This is not just another attempt to start over, but rather considering accomplishing some objectives. One of them was the preparation and holding of elections, regardless of the situation and conditions in which the country was. Given the fact that Albania was in a chaotic situation, fragmented, dysfunctional economy and institutions, holding free and fair elections would have been out of context. It was more of a solution to the situation of political, economic, and social chaos in which the country found itself as a result of the misuse of power by the political class. The struggle between the different political actors could be examined by looking into the continuous cycle of harsh rhetoric that would regularly change the power balance and created tensions in political discourse.

Even after these events, besides that in Albania there is no occurrence of civil unrest and armed clashes, the ruling elites, and political actors, has not changed the harsh rhetoric, fragmentation of politics, autocratic tendencies of party leadership and political exclusion have characterized the ruling elites during all these years of transition. Seen from this optics, the exercise of power in an individual manner is a notable feature of the behavior of the political elite. This is observed in the dysfunction of institutions and administration, which, in principle, are controlled by autonomous units.

This exercise of power has always produced constant clashes between the government and these institutions. The lack of a well-informed public opinion has created the possibility of abuse of power by the political class. The whole politics of this last decade has been loud, antagonistic, and accompanied by internal conflicts, as it has always been among political class leadership. It is led by the will of the leader to dominate over the rest of the group who has different opinions from the leader, transforming political parties into formations controlled by an individual, who in order of personalizing political parties does everything to consolidate power.

This has produced always contested elections, controlled or marginalized institutions that could not function independently of party leadership politics. A real example of this is that, always, we have had a loud or violent winner in power, who has treated the political opponent as an enemy and not as a rival who has lost the votes of the electorate.

As a result of this factor, the political class has always used power as a means of revenge against the political opponent, reducing the level of political reasoning, incapacitating the real political debate on the real coherent problem which is the quality of democracy. The interpretation of a prolonged transition, from the analysis perspective, shows that it has been the most efficient way chosen by the post-communist political elite and that it has served this elite to administrate the power as long as possible, using it as an excuse or to extend domination or to come to power.

Under this assumption, administration, media, and levels of civic society but also academic ranks, are under the influence of party politics which is described as an important tool in directing power to the ruling class, vis-à-vis the political class, the former prominent intellectuals the so-called country elites. Unobjectively this ruling class has not changed for three decades, ultimately switching power between their ranks, producing thus a façade democracy. This situation has accompanied Albanian politics all the time, slowing down the democratic processes in the country.

Despite these behaviors, Albania has taken steps forward on the path of democratic transformations, even though it remains far from the liberal democracy. This is mostly due to condescending ways from the EU and USA partners, treating the Albanian political class as if they require extra help because they're not capable by themselves. This has imposed and burden and obligation toward the foreign pressure and intervention to at least create the democratic framework, necessary for certain pre-conditions for democratic consolidation. Recently this international pressure has increased hand by hand with the ascending demands for EU integration.

2. Purpose and Research Question

The objective is to use Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan's theory of democratic consolidation to answer why Albania was not able to reach democratic consolidation. It will also contain the restrictions of democratic consolidation in Albania which appears to be in a continuous struggle with difficulty for democratization as there is a continuous cycle of abusive power use, the revival of authoritarianism, and yet revival of premises for consolidation of democracy. The theory could be able to identify the problems with the democratic consolidation process during decades of transition and give an answer to why the ruling political elites collapse the system into a closed sequence of recycling itself and retrograde the process into authoritarianism tendencies.

The research questions are as follows: Why did not Albania reach democratic consolidation so far? What were the main challenges for further democratic consolidation in Albania?

Another analysis that aims to use the case of elite power as one illustration for certain theories of principles, or that one aspires to use just a theory of principles to explain the Albanian case of transition, would encounter several troubling paradoxes in the context of these theories.

These paradoxes seem unusual in the context of using a theory that seeks to identify accounts of the Albanian transition expected regularities in a large number of certain cases, as in the case of Mosca and Pareto. Hence the application of principle theories needs to be done more carefully and considering the Albanian specifics case. The consistencies of the theories of principles should be put first. Also, to properly apply the theory of elites, the state must, as a prerequisite be closed from other influences. In the Albanian case, the state is controlled by foreigners; the political class controls the corresponding residents. Moreover, as a requirement, to

prove theories of principles, society must be, theoretically, dependent on the elites. But, there are frequent accusations from civic society and promoters of democracy that the political elite are associated with organized crime, illegal money laundry, the theft of property, and the violation of the law. This intentionally holds power over a criminalized society meanwhile seems that only the foreign chancelleries seem to have real responsibility for the governance of the consolidation of democracy. For these reasons, the theory of the political class, in the way Mosca, and the theory of Pareto elites intended to explain, in analyzing this transition should be used discreetly. It is, therefore, necessary to articulate a theory of ruling class that reflects the particular case but also the specifics of the transition conditioned by the international system, from the prospect of the democratic system, as well as from stipulation of the organization of social society based on a certain doctrine.

The approach is under the frame of qualitative text analysis; requisites that classify the conditions of democratic consolidation will be reinforced and better explained by the ideas of Linz and Stepan. Their theory classifies requisites of three dimensions a consolidated democracy demand. Theory consuming is a suitable method that is expected to give a more profound understanding of the challenges Albania faced in the democratic consolidation process. Besides this approach, to support the elitist theory of power and political class organization concerning the ruling class theory in the case of Albania, sources as Mosca and Pareto, but not only, will complement the chosen method and give a better understanding of the theory on the case of Albania.

3. Theoretical Concepts

In the field of political science, some theoretical concepts are surrounded by extensive debates, due to different interpretations and explanations of the same concepts. Some related theoretical notions should be explained to build a common understanding. This includes further descriptions of transition and democratic consolidation. They are significant to understand the fundamental values which are appropriate for the case of Albania and the process of democratic consolidation.

Democracy and democratization explained in the frame of theoretical consumption, is a concept that has more than a few definitions and is idiosyncratic and differs among thinkers. Modern days are explained as the rule of the people under the frame of liberalism. There are also constitutional approaches in terms of an essential function of democracy, and even economists try to link interchangeably democracy with capitalism. But we are more concerned with the idea that understanding democracy is important to understand the consolidation of it. Thus, a simple look at its original explanation from ancient philosophy, democracy is analyzed in the organization of polis. It seems that direct observation of stratification and functioning of society and the art of political rhetoric, for thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle who placed the first groundwork of political thinking, it was obvious to dismantle it into 'people' and 'power' categories under the

frames of city state-walls, which was the “*politeia*” or the civic society. Anything outside these boundaries was barbaric and not civic (Aristotle, 2003). This means that forms of democratization have occurred even before. The concept of democratization is when a majority declines their individual and specific interest for the general advantage of the society overall and this should have a constructive effect on society and its leadership. It could stop the escalation of manipulators or a government's intention outside the limits of the community association. Therefore, any form of forced changes that could transform the whole society, if there are outside the boundaries of democratic perception, could result in dictatorship or oligarchy rule. Yet, a revolution could change the political regime and also adjust society to the process of consolidation. While we noticed these historical facts that happened during the time, they do not deliver a satisfactory model in modern days and certainly do not explain why modern states turn democratic. It does though advise that a change from tyrannical to democratic forms of government have happened through history.

In modern conceptualizing theories of democracy and consolidation, democracy can be explained as the rule of the people acting accordingly to elect a government. It is done periodically through free and fair elections where parties participate in the competition of power. But is not limited to the party system, also the civil society is free to engage in the political system, citizens can retrieve information from multiple alternative sources that are protected under the rule of law (Dimond, L. 1997, p. 13). This could illustrate the context of democratic consolidation, in a well-functioning democratic society. This is described in the frame of phases that a society undergoes up to the process of consolidation. First, it has to get free from authoritarian rule, and second has to go through the phase of transition. The liberalization phase explains how authoritarian regimes slowly open to the concepts of freedom of speech and expression. But, liberalization does not essentially mirror democratization (Lipset, S. M., & Lakin, J. M. 2004). Dictatorial tendencies can still use power to control the state and secondly, there are other factors apart from elections that define if a state has transitioned into a democracy. Here comes the process of transition, and it is achieved when the political development for how the state elects its government has reached an agreement when the government is chosen by free and fair elections and has the legitimate authority to produce laws. When it is established a system of checks and balances and all the branches do not divide power with institutions and are independent. During the transition phase, which is considered the most difficult phase that society has to endure due to economic and political reforms if completed, the phase of defining the quality and amplitude of democracy called the consolidation process of democracy takes place as a final phase.

In terms of theoretical approach, this is somehow easy to achieve if the process of transition is done right and smooth. Consequently, understanding the concept of democratic consolidation must be explained to understand what a complete democratic consolidation is. According to Linz and Stepan, a democratic state can be considered consolidated when democracy has become “the only game in town” (Linz & Stepan, 1996, p. 3). According to the authors, there are three exclusive dimensions that a democratic consolidation requires and

consisting of behaviorally, attitudinal and constitutional. Behaviorally, a democratic regime is consolidated when no significant national, social, economic, political, or institutional actors spend significant resources attempting to realize their objectives by creating a nondemocratic regime or by separating from the state (Linz & Stepan, 1996, p.15). Attitudinally, a democratic regime is consolidated when a strong majority of public opinion, even amid major economic problems and deep dissatisfaction with officials, holds the belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern collective life, and when support for anti-system alternatives is quite small or more-or-less isolated from pro-democratic forces (Linz & Stepan, 1996, pp. 7-15). Constitutionally, a democratic regime is consolidated when governmental and nongovernmental forces alike become subject to, and habituated to, the resolution of conflict within the bounds of the precise laws, procedures, and institutions sanctioned by the new democratic process (Linz & Stepan, 1996, pp. 7-15). However, Linz & Stepan argues that a consolidated democracy needs to have five correlating arenas for such consolidation to exist (Linz & Stepan, 1996, p. 7). For all these arenas certain needs have to be fulfilled to call a democracy consolidated. These areas are interchangeable, among these Civil Society, Political Society, Rule of Law, Bureaucratic Structure and Economic Society (Linz & Stepan, 1996). Under this category, Economic Society requires certain standards which regulate and facilitate relations between the state and the market and guidelines shaping the behavior in the spheres of the political and social aspect. Institutions are the key element to this behavior and efficient state apparatus that is rooted in the political and civil society would adopt an economic society prone to the consolidation of democracy. This is why a well-structured and healthy economy could be associated with democratic development in the democratic consolidation process.

This is necessary for terms of a theory consuming to have a better grasp on the features of the norms and standards applied in theory, to give an answering of the questions of why Albania did not reach democratic consolidation, and what are the main challenges for further democratic consolidation in Albania.

According to research and literature done chronologically on aspects of transition and the role of elites we can conclude that in terms of the five areas, findings on the area of Civil Society show that disappointment expressed through organized demonstrations, academic disclosures, even times of popular revolts have certainly been contributing and also putting pressure to accelerate the process through demands. This approach towards such progress can be found by observing opinion polls. It shows dissatisfaction with governments linked with authoritarianism. Besides establishing free media press, electronic media, and independent mass communication channels, yet there are findings of direct political attacks on media through political intimidation, and political pressure using state institutions.

During the economic meltdown of 1997 as well as previous failings of elected governments as it sought to increase citizen's participation in the polity and political process. It should be noticed that consistently foreign assistance had and continues to put pressure on the formation of a stable institution, and the formation of a directly involved civic society in the process. These institutions were important starters as they gave power and strength to the opposition, promoting greater democracy. Yet the political class, usually in Albania, still finds ways to corrupt and infringe in the area of civil society, by diminishing its role. Political Society as well has transformed through waves in Albania. Since the election in 1997 and through the timeline of this prolonged transition political polity underwent changes and from the situation of armed conflict failure, significantly increased provision on security issues, as well as military engagement in the fight against terrorism. This classified Albania during the respective timeline that changes took place, as a partner state, and in a good path toward consolidation of democracy. This opened the path for liberalization of traveling visas which did relate to more freedom of movement. Nevertheless, the political class, the few ruling elites, did not partake in any other democratic provisions and managed to recycle itself and remain in power even though very highly contested elections. The whole timeline of this harsh transition is characterized by two faces of political polity in relation to obligations toward democratic society and foreign assistance, double standards, and yet significant tendencies of manipulative behavior in using political power. Significant comments by foreign observers yes did not classify the political polity or class as able to hold free and fair elections where political parties could compete for power. The non-effective democratic system, with double standards, where democracy is not able to uphold itself by segmentation of democratic rule and state apparatus which is considered, as a catalyst for such processes. Another failure is in the arena of rule of law which is the foundation of the democratization process. This arena constitutes that the legislative branch is necessary for prospering of democracy. The quality of the Parliament decreased through the transition timeline up to the point that became ridiculous, and unbearably to watch. Instead of providing a check and balance system against corruption, legacy of accountability, and transparency, it turned into a serving tool to political party leadership and even infringing with the constitutional barriers laid in purpose to uphold and contain this check and balance system. This low quality of parliament was achieved through the closed electoral system that candidates are appointed by political party leaders.

Linz and Stepan explain that autonomy and independence in civil and political societies are important for the rule of law as the rule of law upholds the framework for how these societies operate in consolidating a democracy (Linz & Stepan 1996, p. 10).

Although institutions and organizations initialized a set of reforms to strengthen the consolidation of key elements in functioning democracy, still there is a high concern of practices of vote-buying and electoral corruption that are putting in question even the most prominent theories of transition toward democratic consolidation. Overall, Albania ranks high in the index of corruption, and illegal economic activities. This highlights the imperfections of the Albanian political system and the established institutions was manifested by noticeable flaws, violations, and misconducts.

4. Political class as the central factor for transition failure

The notion of the functioning of political parties is a very important component in the functioning of the political system and the performance of the political elite. Political parties are seen as the main source of origin of the political elite and as the element which by their functioning it gives the political system authentic features such as the degree and direction of the relationship between the influence of the political elite and society relationship during the transition. The credibility of the elite to the society is associated with a decrease in civic trust in the political elite and the state. This has as a condition that the change of the political elite cannot occur in the absence of a change in the size of the relation between state and society. From this point of view, society's relationship is linked by the influence of the political elite. (Michels 1966, p. 364) The influence of the political elite in the construction of the state has a fundamental link between them, where the direction in which it operates determines the improvement or reduction of this relationship. Thus, when one size changes its performance negatively or positively, the state's relationship with society changes as well. So, the influence of the political elite in the relationship between society and the role of the state always accompanies each other. with the advance of one variable, we have the advance of the other variable then the correlation between them is positive, so in case we would have a positive impact on the political elite, normally the relationship between the state and society would be positive, and consequently we had a more consolidated democracy if this ratio decreases then this gives cause for the circulation of the elite. The focus on the elite argument that the ruling class numerically is a small minority but well organized, that works to control every political system, including democracy. (Mosca 1939, p. 50) This is a premise on which all researchers of the theories of principles should agree. Also, the argument, which says that the ruling class fights by all means against any system that does not suit its interests is a familiar argument. Principally, the argument is that any system politically shapes and progresses the state and society, while protecting the interests of the ruling class(Michels 1966, pp.70-73). Despite appearances, the whole political struggle is about establishing control over the state. Even the ideological differences in theories are focused on minimization or strengthening the role of the state in the context of liberal societies with laiz a fair state policies or communitarian with strong state influence on society.

Thus, the differences relate to all aspects of state-society principles in shaping, effectiveness, mindset, validity, and directly relating to the role of this minority that rules. (Mosca 1939, pp. 60-61) The question is whether the political class is only political or extends as layers or influences in control of the economy. That would explain the extension and the criteria of the legitimacy of the ruling class, and how it controls society in terms of how political elites circulate, employing free election or by revolution. This needs to be explained in terms of how is the political class related to the democratic system and its principles and how these elites are connected or represent the state interests (Pareto 1935, p. 1431).

In modern states studies on democratization and consolidation of democracy, the political elites should not play such a central role. As mentioned above in Linz & Stepan approach, the main role should be played by the structures. In the center of everything is the will of the people expressed through periodic elections. But even in the modern tradition of pluralistic systems some groups play a much larger role than others. Therefore, to identify these features, as well and the possibility of applying these theories in the Albanian case, elitists scholars such as Mosca and Pareto could best explain the modalities and discrepancies on general democratic theories focusing on the elitist ones in the case of Albania.

5. Conclusions and Analysis

The Albanian state is in a situation where it is owed to the few party leaders that rule. The Albanian experience shows that political class, organized in a pyramidal structure, can undermine the establishment of democracy, as well as all processes of democratic consolidation if this system conflicts with its interests. Leaders of the political class can successfully oppose foreigners' influence as well. The party may oppose the state's interest in diminishing any foreign influence and also forcing foreigners to accept it as the ruling class. This is due also to weak civic society action as well. In a worse scenario, the ruling class can compete against society's interests, by marginalizing or narrowing the options and economic freedom, pushing society to walk unacceptable paths up to criminal endeavors. To achieve its goals, political rulers can go as far as criminalization full of society. This happened in the Albanian case in the last decade up till now. Such criminal structures are used to establish illegal activities with huge monetary profits, used partially to buy elections. This is reflected in terms of general corruption practices, completely devaluing the transition process. The explanation for the failure of the Albanian transition is related to the political class and its principles. Reflecting exactly on that value system which was shaped during the Communist system, the ruling Albanian elites, this time expanded and changed, are brought as a layer to the Albanian society and it imposed all possible methods which intended to rule and dominate the society and state (Mair, P. 1997). At every step which it is assumed, the ruling party worked to paralyze the state and to control it, to undermine the democratic process, to establish a monopolist economic system, fragmenting society, establishing criminalized control over economic resources and spreading the corruption among impoverished population, simply because it seemed to serve them better political elites' objectives. A corrupted economy and a

criminalized society with an obligation to serve the ruling class only fit the individual or small group interest (Pareto 1935, p. 1608). The common interest unites this minority that rules besides the fact that everyone is different, but everyone follows the same common interest, with the same methods, united on the same objectives. As can be seen from the situation we are in, the Albanian case proves when the political class is determined to walk this path; it serves as a layer and will find the way and methods to weaken democracy and to create an oligarchic system that benefits its interests. When the minority rules because it is in the control of the state and it is public administration, according to Mosca, then we should talk about the political class (Mosca 1939, p.50).

The political method and its legitimacy come from the political position it occupies in society and is justified by the interest of the state. The political class is not completely detached from society. When the minority rules because it is made up of people who have proved to have more ability in their field of expertise, then it is the ruling class, even though Pareto chose to use the term elite" (Pareto 1935, p.1421). In, after all, their rise at the top of the game is the value of skill of their achievement rather than their selection by the people. The term elite, the elect, should be set aside for a minority that works to protect and advance the interest of the whole society not just to use it. This is explained in the approach of distinguishing a set of principles stating that there is a great qualitative difference among the leaders, the political class, the ruling class, and the elite(Pareto 1935, p. 169). These are different categories of minorities that compete to rule. Elites should be bounded by principles and by definition should even sacrifice personal interest so that state-society general interest prevails overall. Elites are those individuals that are organized in groups with common interests and ideological values play a primary, crucial, and systematic role in decision making regarding the social organization, as well as in policymaking and the values of society in a given state on the behalf of societal progress. Albanian case has proved the opposite and in contrast with the modern theories of democratization, paradoxically these theories of principles are the theories that best explain aspects of the important decline of democracy in the Albanian case.

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