

**Nation et communautarisation :
l'ancrage local des partis politiques
en Albanie, Bosnie-Herzégovine, Croatie, Macédoine et Serbie-Monténégro**

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SYNTHESIS

• The analysis of political parties in the states and provinces of the Western Balkans (here Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia-and-Montenegro) intervenes in a context shaped by post-communism and by diverging processes of political pluralization.

The pre-1989 political orders were themselves diversified: The closed Hoxha stronghold on power in Albania (where the last great trials date back to 1982-1983) cannot compare with a self-management based, non-aligned and decentralized Yugoslavia that encouraged workers to go and work abroad.

Similarly, trajectories of changes have varied greatly: In Yugoslavia, the end of the titist system coincided with the violent explosion of the Yugoslav federation followed by the creation of new states. In Albania, the transition away from communism was essentially peaceful and did not put under question the contours of the state.

Finally, political spaces in the Western Balkans reflect the existence of various statuses (a province under international interim administration in Kosovo; a federation whose future is uncertain in Serbia-and-Montenegro; an internationally recognized state, although a fragile one, in Macedonia) and changing degrees of dependance on the international community. Kosovo is still a *de facto* protectorate; Albania depends highly on support from the international monetary organizations; Macedonia has been supervised by the UN, NATO and other international organizations while implementing the Ohrid Agreement (August 13, 2001). This should be kept in mind because the political game in the states and regions under review is highly influenced by issues concerning delimitation of territories and political communities.

- Beyond the variations in communist experiences, trajectories of change after 1989-1990 and in the emerging political orders, political actors face some common challenges:

- The first challenge concerns the production of a common vision for the future and the capacity of political parties to present themselves as actors able to articulate citizen demands and to defend them once they are in power. At stake the legitimacy of the new democratic orders and of the current political elite. Across the cases under review, perceptions of politics appear quite similar - politics is seen as a highly personalized and divisive game where individuals quarrel over personal issues more than political projects, where political leaders are equally corrupt and incapable to promote change. Frustrations varie in space and time; yet the negative representations of politics constrain the behavior of political actors. Untiringly, political entrepreneurs need to look for rhetorics and resources that might endow them with legitimacy.

- The second challenge relates to the routinisation of electoral consultations and to the meanings of voting. Electoral participation rates have decreased over the 1990s. This decrease can only be partially explained with reference to the extraordinarily high levels of participation recorded on the first free ballots (power changes raised hopes; old habits of compulsory vote were still effective). Mostly, low participation reflect the voters' discontent with a situation in which changes in political majorities do not translate into policy changes. In Serbia, three consultations were thus necessary to elect a new president - Boris Tadic in June 2004 -. Meanwhile the Assembly had to amend the electoral rule - the 50% participation threshold was suppressed - in order to get out of the institutional and political deadlock.

At the same time - and this phenomenon, less known, would deserve to be studied further - political actors are at times tempted to repeatedly resort to early elections with a view to overcoming tensions among coalition partners or else to regain political impetus. The remark owes true for Montenegro, where parliamentary elections have be held every other year on average since the collapse of Yugoslavia. To what extent do these repeated ballots offer a response to the disrepute of governmental teams? Should early eelctions be used as *the* major tool for reconciling coalition partners or forging new alliances? How do they affect the credibility of the political game?

- Finally, a third common tendency concerns the comparatively modest role questions of economic reforms or, more generally, ideological issues, play in shaping party cleavages. A few political formations do present a clear-cut ideological profile (some small neo-communist parties, for instance). Nevertheless, contrary to political scientists' expectations at the beginning of the 1990s, party cleavages did not get mostly structured around a left/right political divide (at least, in the way that dichotomy is defined in France). Often, analysts assess this trend as bearing testimony to a supposed lack of democratic "maturity" in the Balkans (and, more widely, in post-communist states). In such analyses, the strength of personal allegiances is seen as preventing the development of competing political projects that would be grounded upon contrasting visions of the common good. Yet the study of political parties in Albania, in Macedonia, in Kosovo and in Serbia-and-Montenegro does not confirm such an argument. Although most political parties are identified with their leader(s), competitive visions of the common good and political cleavages do exist.

Political actors in the Western Balkans do not have a wide room for maneuver when it comes to economic reforms. To some extent, economic policies are indeed overdetermined by the international context: Local elites need financial support from the intenational financial

organizations and have to look for their approval. They also need to take into account the emergence of a standardized vision, in the West, of what sound economic policy is supposed to mean (privatization, foreign investments, macro-economic stability). Hence political parties - whether they come from the post- or the anti-communism end of the political spectrum - cannot freely choose the instruments they use when shaping economic policies. As a result, party cleavages do not mostly reflect diverging views of the economy.

- On the other hand, several cleavages may be identified in the Western Balkans :
 - the reading of the communist experience and of the past;
 - the definitions of national identity;
 - foreign policy preferences.

Note that the salience of identity-related issues is conditional upon the degree of certainty/uncertainty over the existence and the future of the political community. For instance, interrogations over identity seem to be of particular importance in the definition of party politics in Montenegro and of Macedonia. In Montenegro, especially after 1997, the political debate focused on an opposition between a Democratic socialist party (Milo Djukanovic) that favored strengthening Montenegrin national identity and creating an independent state, and political parties - notably the Socialist people's party - that wanted to stay with Serbia in a common federation. Interestingly enough, though, this distribution of preferences did not remain unchanged throughout the decade. The first proponent of independence for Montenegro was, in the early 1990s, the Liberal Alliance, a party that was at that time opposed by the Democratic socialist party. In other terms, divisions relating to readings of national identity vary in time. So does their political usage by parties. Besides, identities are not understood in a univocal manner. Rather the mobilizations of national references change over time as the past undergoes selective rediscoveries.

In that respect, the example of Macedonia is telling. From 1991, the political game was shaped by the confrontation between the heirs to the former Communist League (the SDSM) and an anti-communist party, the VMRO-DPMNE, that was famed for being nationalistic. Their divisions were grounded in contradictory readings of communism (more valued by the SDSM than by the VMRO-DPMNE), as well as in different understandings of the contribution of the communist era to the creation of a Macedonian national identity. The SDSM stressed the role Titist Yugoslavia had played in shaping Macedonian identity, while VMRO-DPMNE supporters, following in L. Georgievski's footsteps, wished to rediscover the contribution of the late XXth Century-early XXth Century national struggles (as well as of the links with Bulgaria) to the history of the Macedonian nation. Yet, the political game is not as simple as it may seem at first sight. Two nuances are called for here: On one hand, neither the SDSM, nor the VMRO-DPMNE are unanimous when it comes to appreciating national history. For example, not all VMRO-DPMNE members shared L. Georgievski and Dosta Dimovska's pro-Bulgarian feelings. On the other hand, age-groups need to be taken into account. In the second half of the XXth Century, the Macedonian national construction has coincided with a growing effort at anchoring Macedonian national identity in an ever more distant past. That trend - visible in historiographic debates - goes much beyond the question of party preferences: Most political elites share in that endeavor. What conclusions should we therefore draw when it comes to comprehending party cleavages and party social bases? If the questions relating to the interpretations of history and nation are central to party dynamics in most of the cases we studied, their contribution to the structuring of party life must be analyzed with care, allowing for the identification of differences in time, in space and according to the social groups under review.

- Party systems in the Balkans are more or less anchored in time. Their distribution also varies. One may distinguish situations where the party system is mostly bipolar : Such is the case, for example, in Albania, with an opposition between Socialist party and the Democratic party. The same applies to Macedonia, where - within the Slav majority - the two major protagonists are the SDSM and the VMRO-DPMNE. In other cases, the political stage is more diverse, more fragmented with frequent shifts in alliances and a game that is organized around 4 or 5 poles. This configuration can be observed in Serbia. In both cases, though, political organizations face strong internal tensions, with factions and scissions as a common feature.

Correlatively, political leaders tend to exhaust their political support rather rapidly - yet, the emergence of alternative political actors is not an easy process: Sali Berisha and Fatos Nano have remained the two central actors of party life in Albania since 1990, despite attempts on the part of the new generation to take over the parties. In Serbia, people like Vuk Draskovic and Vojislav Šešelj, to quote but two examples, have experienced a variety of governments and mandates in the 1990s. In Macedonia, Branko Crvenkovski has been in power from 1992 onwards (with only one break between 1998 and 2002). In Montenegro, Milo Djukanovic has successively been Prime minister, president and Prime minister again - retaining hold of power for over a decade. This gap between rapid political loss in credibility and long stays in power is one of the reasons for the disillusionment of the voters. Still, one does not know to what extent the emergence of a new generation in politics may induce a change in political practices and discourses.

How can one shed light on the territorial anchoring of these political parties and which place does the politization of identities play in shaping the territorial distribution of electoral support? In countries with diverse minorities (the hellophone minority in Albania, Serbian and Rom minorities in Kosovo, a 25% strong Albanian minority in Macedonia, Hungarian, Muslim and Albanian minorities in Serbia), minorities have set up their own political parties. At a first level, one may therefore consider that the political game is to some extent community-based. Nevertheless, the relationships between minorities and majority (récip. between minority and majority parties), the relations among the various minorities, and the attitude of minority citizens to their own community parties vary enormously from one country to the other. Differences stem from diverse historical experiences - notably in minority rights and political participation - as well as from the paths that were followed after the collapse of communism (and of Yugoslavia). From that standpoint, two cases are of particular interest, that of Macedonia and of Vojvodina. Macedonia, since 1991, has never experienced a situation in which some party would successfully reach out to all communities - beyond ethnic, language and religious differences. From the first general elections onwards, Albanian politicians have competed among themselves to win Albanian votes, while Slavic parties have fought over the "Slavic" electorate. The small minorities (Turkish, Rom, Serbian and Vlach) also have their own community organizations, which participate in the ballots either alone or alongside one of the major Slavic parties. Yet, minority spaces are not political monoliths: Within the Albanian communities, several political formations are in competition, usually two or three. To put it otherwise, voting cannot be reduced to a mere « ethnic census». Electoral choices are diversified although they did not cross over the community delimitations.

A second distinctive trait of the Macedonian experience deserves attention: Until recently, Albanian political actors have not successfully endeavored to set up a coalition with other minorities. Because they share the same faith, the Albanians and the Turks could have been expected by some observers to work together on the political stage. In practice, the

relationships between the two communities are not devoid of tensions, notably as a result of the growing role of the Albanian community (in politics and also at the helm of Muslim religious institutions) and of a feeling of peripheralization among the Turkish community. At the time of the last municipal elections, in March 2005, however, efforts were made to reach out to the Turks: The Albanian BDI put some Turkish candidates on its lists in municipalities where the Turkish population was in a majority. It also tried to negotiate electoral support from Turkish parties in settlements with mixed population. But as a rule, cooperation across minorities has not been frequent.

The trajectory of the region of Vojvodina - that was autonomous until the abolition, in 1989, of the 1974 status by the Milosevic regime - is very different: Over the past decade, one has witnessed in turn situations in which Hungarian parties competed alone in the elections, situations in which they sealed an alliance with Belgrade-based Serbian parties and attempts at forming a coalition with other minorities (in the December 2003 Parliamentary elections, "Together for Tolerance" included a Bosniak party from Sandžak, for instance).

As a result, party dynamics are indeed influenced by the relationships between majority and minorities, as well as by the emergence, in the 1990s, of minority parties. Nonetheless, the electoral game should not be misunderstood as a pure game of demographics. Cleavages (and solidarities) cut across minority parties, the various communities, and the ties between minorities and majority. Alliances depend on the issues at stake. Hence, although one should take account of the existence of various ethnic, religious and local identifications in the study of political parties, no mechanical treatment of these various affiliations is called for. Identifications are plural; they change over time. Their political translation is not given once for all either. Rather it depends on the political and social context, as well as on the strategies political actors adopt. Ultimately, these strategies are what the political scientist should focus on - instead of looking for essentialized self-explanatory categories.