BRIEF ANALYSIS ON CHANGES DURING THE LAST TWENTY YEARS AND PROPOSALS FOR ISSUES RELATED TO NEW AMENDMENTS IN THE ALBANIAN CONSTITUTION

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Abstract

This study presents, in a summarized way, the process for the drafting of the basic act of the state in Albania since the declaration of independence, November 28, 1912. The behavior of the current political class towards the Constitution, the presentation of problems and issues that can be discussed in the framework of a comprehensive constitutional reform, are also subject of analysis in this study. The first legislative document at the level of the basic act of the state is the Organic Statute approved in 1914, during the time of Prince Wied, in which the monarchy was announced as the form of government system in Albania. Among other acts, with constitutional power, that were approved until after the end of the second world war, the Fundamental Statute of the Kingdom, 1928 stands out. The constitutions that were approved in 1946 and 1976 have sanctioned the dictatorship of the proletariat as the system of government in Albania. In these constitutions, private property and free initiative were not allowed. The main constitutional provisions, 1992 and the approved Constitution, by referendum in November, 1998, sanctioned the Parliamentary Republic as a government system in Albania. The Constitution of Albania contains special provisions to preserve its "solid core". Its provision 177 regulates this need in accordance with international standards. However, the Albanian political class, in many cases, driven by its political interests, has made changes to the Constitution, which have negatively affected, especially to the balance between powers, in the functioning of the rule of law and the "check and balance" principle. The Constitutional amendments in the framework of the reform in the judicial system and amendments that made possible the implementation of the law "On ensuring the integrity of persons elected, appointed, or holding public functions", also known as the decriminalization law are evaluated as positive and effective developments. In order to restore to the Constitution, the qualities it has lost as a result of the amendments made with political context, it is proposed that the Albanian legislative body should organize and implement a comprehensive constitutional reform. The issues related to the need for strengthen the basis on which is developed the state of law, initiative and free market, should be important part of this constitutional reform. For all constitutional amendments that are proposed in this study it is important to formulate solutions that are compatible with the expected political, economic, social and democratic developments, in line with the process of Albania's membership in the EU.

Keywords: Constitution, amendments, constitutional reform, Albania

1. Introduction

The constitution is the most powerful legal act and the basis on which the entire legal structure of a state is built. In constitution contains acts that deal with various narrowly legal issues and aspects, as well as definitions and concepts related to social and political aspects. that regulate the different aspects of political, economic and social live of society. As Merkuri, E. (2015) points out from a legal point of view "The Constitution is defined as the basic and organic law of a nation or state that defines the institutions and governing apparatus, defines the purpose of exclusive sovereign governmental powers and guarantees for individual rights and freedoms". In constitutional theory, one often encounters the definition according to which the constitution is

defined as the basic law of the state, in which provides the principles, structure and main functions of its organization (Black's Law Dictionary 2009). Omari & Anastasi (2010) point out that "...many authors consider the Constitution as an agreement, or a contract made between all citizens on the one hand and their rulers on the other. This contract defines the rights of the parties (citizens and rulers)".

In the formal sense, the Constitution is the act that has supremacy over all other acts. The Constitution is applied directly, having as its main goal: (i) to determine the main procedures for the adoption of normative acts; (ii) to divide the powers between the bodies that adopt legal norms; (iii) determining the essence of the content of legal norms and (iv) checking the constitutionality by the constitutional judge.

According to different authors, in a material sense, the Constitution is the document that contains the norms and rules of the functioning of the state power, especially for the higher state bodies, as well as the relationship between these bodies. It contains the rules that determine the powers and regulate the procedures for issuing general normative acts and laws (Kelzen, H. 1981, Zaganjori, et al, 2011). It defines what the country's political institutions are as well as reflects the relationship of social forces operating in society.

The constitution, as the basic act that regulates the relations between people and their coexistence in society, has its origin in Greece and old Rome. The Constitution of Ancient Greece has be treated in the paper "Politics" by Aristotle. In Rome, the term "Constitution" meant any act issued by the Emperor. In the Middle Ages, the terms Carta or Statuto were used, which are also considered as the predecessors of the term Constitution. They were acts that contained privileges for religious institutions and nobles. Among them, the most famous and the most important is the Magna Charta Libertatum (Great Charter of Liberties), which became the inspiration for modern material and formal constitutions.

The term Constitution was used for the first time in England (1688). The first English constitution was the Instrument of Government drawn up by Cromwell (1653).

The US Constitution (1787) is actually the first legal document that contains everything that should be understood with this document, in modern times. This Constitution defines the republican government system for the USA, a system which operates based on the principle of separation of powers. Executive power is exercised by the President. The constitution defines a strong executive and independent judiciary.

Zaganjori (2001) states that "...the constitution is an agreement which defines the main rules of the "game" in a society. It defines the basis for the organization of society. The constitution defines the general and special principles and mechanisms of the organization of the state".

2. Albanian constitutional legal acts

The first modern document that contains the essential elements of a constitution was drafted by Sami Frasheri in the work "Albania what it was, what it is and what it will become"(1899)1. Inspired by the developments in the USA and France, Sami Frasheri wrote this work, in which he addressed the main issues that must be taken into account and must be resolved, with the aim of creating an independent state with a modern government. In the book, he elaborates on the principle of collegial management, the principle of representation of the people and the secularity of the state. In this document, for the government of the power, it was foreseen to establish and

¹ https://pdfslide.net/documents/ebook-shqip-albanian-sami-frashri-shqiperia-cka-qene-eshte-e-cdo-te-behet.html

function (i) Eldership - Presidency, (ii) General Council - Parliament, (iii) Council of Ministers - Government, (iv) Independent Courts and (v) Autonomous local power.

The **Organic Statute** of Albanian state approved in 1914, during the time of Prince Wied, declared the monarchy as a form of government. The National Assembly, the parliament, which was controlled by the prince, was defined as an elected body. The right to vote was provided only to citizens over the age of 30 and educated. The statute proclaimed the independence of the Albanian state, ensured a partial sovereignty and partially guaranteed the independence of the powers.

The **Statute of Lushnja** (1920) and the **Extended Statute of Lushnja** (1922) reaffirmed the independence and sovereignty of the Albanian state. They defined as organs of power: (i) the National Council - Parliament; (ii) Regency Council (4 members) – President of the state. The Extended Statute reaffirmed the Monarchy and sanctioned the separation of powers. The expanded statute provided for the irresponsibility of the king and the responsibility of ministers before parliament. Parliament could not dismiss the High Council (king's regency) and it could not dissolve parliament. The Statute provided some rights for citizens and the principle of their legality and equality before the law.

In 1925 the **Basic Statute of the Republic** was approved. According to it Albania was defined a Presidential Republic (the head of state leads the government). In this Statute, the principles of separation of powers and sovereignty are preserved. Parliament became bicameral. Although the Statute guaranteed fundamental rights, free political activity was not ensured.

The **Fundamental Statute of the Kingdom**, (1928), the constitution, restored the Monarchy. The Assembly elected the King of the Albanians (Zogu I). Parliament consisted of one chamber. The King had the right to dissolve the parliament. Ministers should answer to him. The King had the right to appointed and dismissed the ministers. The King had extensive legislative and executive powers. The role of the legislator was weakened. The judicial system was envisaged as independent. Citizens' rights were re-sanctioned. Despite this, it should be noted that some political rights remained only in the declarative, formal framework.

The **Constitution** approved on **1946** by the National Assembly sanctioned the establishment of the communist system as the governing system for the country. It provided, for the first time in Albania, the right of women to vote and be elected. The Constitution sanctioned the unity of power, which should be exercised by representative bodies: The National People's Assembly and the People's councils at local level. These bodies exercised legislative and executive powers. In the 1946 Constitution, several main rights were guaranteed: such as private property and political rights, which were later revoked.

The **Constitution** approved on **1967** deepened the communist character in the government system, strengthened the action of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the censoring character of the constitution. Albania was named the People's Socialist Republic of Albania. The economy was completely centralized: property rights and free private initiative were revoked. All other rights provided by the Constitution were in fact only declared but fictitious rights.

The Main Constitutional Provisions, which were approved in 1992, were a combination of three laws:

- Law on the form of government, which established the country's government according to the democratic parliamentary system, political pluralism and sanctioned the separation of powers

- The law that foresaw, for the first time, the creation of the Constitutional Court as a constitutional control body.

- The law that guaranteed an expanded catalog of basic rights and freedoms of citizens.

The main constitutional provisions remained in force until November 1998, when, with a constitutional referendum, the Constitution of the Republic of Albania was approved.

3. Changes in the Constitution of the Republic of Albania

3.1 Attitudes towards the legislative process for changing the constitution: The constitution should be drafted in such a way that it guarantees a long life and stability. Being the highest legal act, it must not only reflect and treat, in the most complete, accurate and exhaustive manner, the basic problems of the current social, economic and social system, but, at the same time, it must possess capacities enough to respond to the dynamics and changes that may occur during the years in society. Attitudes towards this quality that the Constitution is required to possess are not all the same. They have changed over time and different solutions have been formulated for them. The first constitutions, like that of Germany, France, Spain, Greece, were very rigid constitutions. In addition, the Constitution of Spain (1912) and that of Greece (1911, 1952) had sanctioned up to the prohibition of their change.

The need to change the Constitution is often justified by the need to reflect in the basic legislation of the state social and political changes that occur over the years. In the "Declaration of Human Rights 1793", the Constitution of the French Republic I, article 28, it is emphasized: "A people always has the right to review, reform and change its Constitution. Current generations cannot impose their laws on future generations." Hans Kelzen argues that, "democracy by its very nature is relative and therefore the majority has the right to make any changes it agrees on"². Meanwhile, unlike him, Karl Schmid (2008) defends the idea that every constitution is based or supported on a fundamental decision or compromise, therefore it cannot be questioned through procedures aimed at changing it³. Following this consideration, Schmid raises the question "Can it be accepted that democracy gives power to the majority to make anti-democratic changes?"

Zaganjori (2002) points out that "the Constitution, being an act of such great importance and which preserves the normal functioning of the life of a country based on established rules, of course also needs its protection, in order so that it does not change according to the narrow wishes of the groups that take power". Such a mechanism, as a rule, is part of the Constitution. It consists of the constitutional provisions that define the rules of how the Constitution can be amended, which, as Zaganjori (2001) points out, as a political process are "different from all other legislative procedures".

In order to avoid undemocratic changes, in general, an intermediate path has been found for constitutional revision or changes. In almost all democratic countries, the review or amendment of specific articles of the Constitution is foreseen only if at least a 2/3 majority in the parliament votes for this purpose, which is practically achieved through cooperation and consensus between the main political parties, including of the opposition. As Kapiti (2015) points out, "the preliminary compromise of the majority with the minority and the involvement of the opposition in this process is more necessary for the sake of democracy and stability in the country". On the other hand, after this vote, as a rule, constitutional amendments or amendments are also subject to popular referendum.

² Hans Kelsen, Reine Rechtslehre, 2 Auflage 1960. Cited: Xhezair Zaganjori, "Democracy and the Rule of Law", "Luarasi" Publishing House, Tirana 2002, p.63.

³ Carl Schmitt, Constitutional Theory, Duke University Press, London, 2008.

The Albanian Constitution approved in 1998 is a rigid Constitution. Its rigidity derives from the formula according to which its revision can be made, article 177. Despite this, the current practice of amending our Constitution shows that, more than the provisions of the constitution that form the mechanism for the protection and stability of the Constitution, the main factor for this protection is the political will, which is based on the agreement between the political parties, the majority and the opposition.

3.2 Amendments to the Constitution of Albania during the period 1998-2021: Although as it was emphasized above, the Constitution of Albania, November 1998, is a rigid Constitution, during the period of about 20 years since its approval by popular referendum, occasional changes have been made. Referring to the frequency of the changes made, it can be said that the Albanian legislature has not respected the principle of stability for the basic legal act of the state.

To guarantee stability, the Albanian Constitution has its article 177. This article provides that, in order to approve amendments to the Constitution, it is necessary that no less than 2/3 of the members of the Assembly or no less than 94 deputies vote in favor of them. In addition, this provision stipulates that, if requested by no less than 1/5 of the deputies of the Assembly, the approved constitutional amendment is passed for final approval in a constitutional referendum. The Constitution also provides for the case when a draft amendment with a decision, which must be taken by no less than 2/3 of the members of the Assembly, passes to be approved or not directly in a constitutional referendum. It should be emphasized that the use of the referendum mechanism for the changes made in the Constitution depends on the political will. This legislative conditioning has resulted in the fact that none of the amendments made to the Constitution approved in 1998 has been submitted to the constitutional referendum.

During the period after the adoption of the Constitution by popular referendum and until today, changes have been made to the Constitution of Albania, which, not in every case, have been justified by the need for legislative adjustments that would create better conditions for the functioning of the democracy, the government and the society.

The first change in the Constitution was made in January, 2007⁴. Article 109, paragraph 1 and article 154, paragraph 1 were changed. These changes had as their effect, respectively, the extension from 3 to 4 years of the mandate for the representative bodies that are elected for local self-government and increasing the number of members of the Central Election Commission from 7 to 9 members. The first amendment was necessary. The extension of the mandate for local elected officials created better conditions for the functioning of local elected bodies. Meanwhile, the second amendment served only as an opportunity used by the political class to resolve the political impasse. This change was also an attempt by the political parties to increase the space for their action as administrators of the election processes, space which was narrowed as a result of the formula provided by the Constitution of 1998 for the formation of the Central Election Commission as a impartial institution and non politic.

Amendments done in the Constitution which are an important negative effect on the political, social and economic life of the country are those that were made in 2008. The majority and the opposition of the time and their leaders, based on mainly political interests, approved constitutional changes, which have generated negative effects on the quality of the functioning of representative democracy and respecting the principle of balance between powers. Changes, with

⁴ Ligji nr. 9675/2007 "Për disa ndryshime në ligjin nr.8417, datë 21.10.1998 "Kushtetuta e Republikës së Shqipërisë", të ndryshuar. https://www.krimizgjedhor.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Ligji-nr.-9675-date-13.1.2007.pdf

all the great importance they had, were not subject to their preliminary judgment and for them a constitutional referendum was not requested.

Among the amendments made in 2008⁵, an important place is the change of the electoral system according to which the elections for the Assembly of Albania are held and the abrogation of the constitutional provisions that regulated the election of the Central Election Commission. According to these changes, the elections for the Assembly take place in accordance with the requirements of the regional proportional system and the electoral zones are determined by referring to one of the administrative territorial divisions of the country. According these amendments the composition of the Central Election Commission and the election of their members are the subject of the Electoral Code. These changes and their implementation showed that the decision taken for them, first and foremost, was the result of the political interests of the country's two main parties, SP and PD.

The amendment of 2008 imposes a time limit, up to 5 years, on the mandate of the General Prosecutor.

The object of these changes was the intervention in the procedure for the election of the President of the Republic. According to this change, the process for the election of the President of the Republic, in its final step, foresees the election of the President with a simple majority of all members of the Assembly - with 71 votes. In this way, the institution of the President of the Republic, and his election, was exposed in a sensitive manner to the will of the majority. These constitutional amendments, adding also to the changes that were made in the Constitution in the provisions that regulate the motion of confidence and no confidence in the Prime Minister, have significantly influenced the guarantee and operation of the constitutional principle of transparency, in the separation and balance between powers. In addition, their effect is also the significant strengthening of the leadership role of the majority in the entire political and institutional life of the country.

The constitutional amendments of September 2012⁶ changed the content of articles 73, 126 and 137, which refer respectively to the status and immunity of the deputy, the member of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court.

One of the important amendments made in the Constitution of Albania is the change made for the needs of the law for the integrity and purity of the figure of elected officials and high public officials, otherwise known as the Law on decriminalization⁷. Together with the package of amendments to the Constitution on the basis of which the reform of the judicial power is being developed⁸, these are evaluated as having a significant effect on the development of the rule of law and the rule of law in Albania. Meanwhile, it should be noted that these are among the few changes made in the Constitution that were not motivated by political interest and were not made to be used in the function of these interests and political contests.

The last amendments made in the Constitution of the country are those made in July, 2021⁹. The opposition have been evaluated these changes, as amendments, which were made only and

⁵ Ligj Nr.9904, datë 21.4.2008 "Për disa ndryshime në ligjin nr.8417, datë 21.10.1998 "Kushtetuta e Republikës së Shqipërisë", të ndryshuar. https://www.aksesdrejtesi.al/dokumenta/1594983354ligj-2008-04-21-9904.pdf

⁶ Ligji nr. 88/2012. "Për disa ndryshime në ligjin nr.8417, datë 21.10.1998 "Kushtetuta e Republikës së Shqipërisë", të ndryshuar. https://www.krimizgjedhor.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/ligji-nr.-882012-date-18.09.2012.pdf

⁷ Ligji nr. 137/2015"Për disa ndryshime në ligjin nr.8417, datë 21.10.1998 "Kushtetuta e Republikës së Shqipërisë", të ndryshuar. https://www.aksesdrejtesi.al/dokumenta/1594989977ligj-2015-12-17-137.pdf

⁸ Ligji nr. 76/2016. "Për disa ndryshime në ligjin nr.8417, datë 21.10.1998 "Kushtetuta e Republikës së Shqipërisë", të ndryshuar. https://www.aksesdrejtesi.al/dokumenta/1594990439ligj-2016-07-22-76-2016.pdf

⁹ Ligji Nr. 115/2020 "Për disa ndryshime në ligjin nr.8417, datë 21.10.1998 "Kushtetuta e Republikës së Shqipërisë" të ndryshuar., https://www.krimizgjedhor.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/ligji-nr.-115-dt.-30.7.2020.pdf

mainly in function of the political interest of the majority, the Socialist Party. According to these amendments the electoral subject can be only the political parties or citizens as the independent candidates. The coalition of some political parties is not envisaged as an electoral subject in the Constitution. In the event that several parties want to compete together, as a coalition, the Electoral Code stipulates that they must compete with a common list of candidates. According to the amendments made in July, 2021, for the parliamentary elections, the voter has the opportunity to vote not only for the electoral subject but also for one of the candidates of the multi-numbered list of this subject. The amended Constitution also established the national threshold as a condition for the electoral subjects to be included in the calculation for the allocation of mandates.

An important change that was made in the Constitution was the abrogation of the constitutional provision which determined the obligation that for the needs of the implementation of the regional proportional system, the division of the country into electoral units should be made in accordance with one of the administrative territorial divisions of the country. In fact, this change went unnoticed by any political factor. The change created a fairly good legal space to reduce the number of electoral units, up to a maximum of 2 units. If such a thing would have been done, the reduction of the negative effect on the power of the vote for convert into mandate, caused by the division of the country into 12 electoral units, would be significant.

4. Issues that can be part of the future platform for the amendments of Constitution

The Constitution includes provisions dealing with principles that, due to their supreme or fundamental qualities and their connections with other important principles, cannot and should not be changed. These provisions make up what is often called the "*solid core*" of the Constitution. The prohibition of their revision and change is done in order to preserve the democratic content of the constitution. These provisions guarantee the essence and democratic content of the state. Among them can be listed the provisions that deal with: (i) the political-legal principles that constitute the foundations of the Constitution; (ii) the principles contained in human rights declarations; (iii) provisions on the form of government or state; (iv) provisions for the revision procedures of the Constitution; etc.

In the following proposals for possible amendments in the Albanian Constitution, care has been taken that they do not affect its "core" provisions. The proposed adjustments, in most of them, aim for the Constitution of the Republic of Albania to regain the qualities it has lost as a result of the interventions made in it over the years. The interventions that are proposed to be made in the Constitution aim to further improve the necessary bases for the development of the state of law, initiative and the free market, in accordance with the expected political, economic, social developments and in the exercise of democracy, which will accompany the accession of Albania to the EU.

In the platform for the future changes to the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, the following can be included as issues for discussion and to find solutions, as following:

1. Changes related to the Albanian Parliament.

Part of the discussions may be:

- The Assembly with one or two chambers
- The Assembly with 140, 120 or 100 members
- 2. Electoral system for elections to the Parliament of Albania

The aim should be increasing of the quality of voters-citizens representation in the Parliament.

3. Election of the President directly by the people as the possibility to increase the spaces for the institution of the President as a representative of the unity of the people and for a more effective balancing of powers

4. Changes to improve the balance between the different powers, among which, but not only, may be part:

- Amendment of the motion of no confidence and confidence in the Prime Minister, to better balance the executive power with other powers.

- The relationship between the President's decree for non-decree of the law and the decision of the Assembly for this decree

- Review of the right of the central executive power to dissolve directly elected bodies for local government

- Restrictions on the current unconditional right of the Prime Minister to build and reconfigure the structural organizational chart of the Council of Ministers and government institutions

5. Constitutional regulation of issues and decision-making for regional and international cooperation

6. Vetting of politicians and high state officials

7. Change in the system of organization of local government and in the system of election of local government bodies:

-reconceptualization of levels for the organization of local government in municipalities, communes and regions,

- the election of mayors and councils in all levels directly by the people,

the election of council members of local government units by voting with open lists.8. Changes in the provisions for referendums with emphasis on:

- the possibility to call the constitutional referendum at the request of the citizens,

- the local referendum.

9. Changes to strengthen the functioning of democracy in political parties, through:

- the implementation of the primaries for the election of candidates for deputy, head of local unit, region and councilors,

- regulation of political party funding issues to increase transparency for funding sources

10. Treatment into the Constitution of issues related to the organization and function of non-political and non-profit institutions of civil society

4. Conclusions

Efforts to drafting a basic act for governance in Albania began after Albania was declared an independent state, in November, 28, 1912. The first legislative document of this level is the Organic Statute approved in 1914, during the time of Prince Wied, in which the monarchy was announced as the form of government of Albania.

The Fundamental Statute of the Kingdom, 1928, stands out among the acts with constitutional force approved before the Second World War.

The constitutions approved in 1946 and 1976 have sanctioned the dictatorship of the proletariat as the government system in Albania. In these Constitutions the Private property and free initiative were not allowed. Basic human rights were only a formal expression.

The Main Constitutional Provisions, 1992 and the approved Constitution, by referendum in November, 1998, sanctioned as the government system-the parliamentary republic

Although special provisions are included in the Constitution of Albania to preserve its "solid core" and to create as little room for changes in it as possible, the Albanian political class has managed to make frequent changes in the Constitution. The changes made have affected the balance between powers, the functioning of the rule of law and the "check and balance" principle.

The constitutional amendments related to the reform in the Albanian judicial system and the changes that make possible the functioning of the law "on decriminalization" evaluate as the most effective changes that carried out in the Albanian Constitution.

In order to restore to the Constitution, the qualities it has lost as a result of the interventions made, it is proposed that the Albanian legislative body should organized and developed a comprehensive constitutional reform. Important part of this reform should be the issues related to the need to strengthen the state of law, initiative and free market.

For the changes that are proposed to be discussed in the framework of future constitutional reform, solutions must be sought that are compatible with the expected political, economic, social developments and in the exercise of democracy, which will accompany the accession of Albania to the EU.

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