

Does the Communist Mentality Explain the Behaviour of Albanian Politicians During the Transition Period?

Gerti SQAPI¹

Abstract

During the three decades since Albania overthrew the communist dictatorial system and began its democratic changes, the existence of a line of thought in Albanian society has been noted, which tends to explain the behaviour of Albanian politicians during the transition period based on the assumption of a “communist mentality” carried by them. This line of thought has often been dominant and has been reflected in the Albanian media and public space as a form of “main” explanation to show many of the failures that Albanian democracy has faced during these 30 years, the authoritarian behaviour of political elites, the “state capture” by political parties, the crisis of state institutions, etc. Applying the concept of “communist mentality” in the Albanian media and public space and explaining through it (almost) any kind of negative phenomenon, problem, or behaviour that contradicts the idea of democracy or prevents it from developing, is very problematic, therefore it has served as an impetus in undertaking this study. In this paper, a critical approach will be offered to this discourse that has often dominated the Albanian media and public space, questioning whether is this “communist mentality” the determining factor for the behaviour of Albanian politicians and the failures of Albanian democracy or there are other factors that may explain these phenomena.

Key Words: Communist Mentality, Political Culture, Political Elites, Political Behaviour, Democracy, State Capture.

“You do not know what it means to do six months in prison. Not them, but even if I had been there instead of them, not six, but even just two months in prison, I would have become a communist and surpassed the communist. “This means that they have now become hardened communists, and if they get out of there who knows what they will do?”².

Introduction

The year 2021 is an important jubilee date for Albania, as it marks the 30th anniversary of the beginning of its democratic changes after the overthrow of the communist regime. However, in these 30 years, Albania, unlike some other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, has not managed to institutionalize a well-functioning democracy in its environment and still faces today large deficits in its functioning, with authoritarian behaviour of its political elites, lack of political accountability, “state capture” by political parties, etc. In general, during these 30 years, to explain the difficult transition and the many problems faced by the defective functioning of democracy in Albania, one of the main reasons given is

¹ Dr. Gerti Sqapi is a lecturer at the Department of Applied Social Sciences, Faculty of Law, Political Sciences and International Relations at the European University of Tirana. He holds a doctoral degree in Political Sciences and his teaching is focused on subjects of Sociology and Political Science.

² Excerpt from the Albanian telecomedy “*The Prefect*”, which has as its main character Qazim Mulleti, a former prefect of Tirana region during the years of fascist occupation of Albania.

the legacy of the previous regime that materializes in the “communist mentality” of political elites in post-communism. Therefore, one explanation that has been given the most, and that has often been dominant in the Albanian public opinion, is that the “faults” of the defective functioning of the Albanian democracy belong to this “communist mentality” of the Albanian politicians. Thus, in essence, the problems of Albanian democracy stems from this communist mentality of our leaders. Likewise, there is a tendency that any kind of behaviour of Albanian politicians considered negative, which contradicts the ideal of democracy, tends to be equated or identified with the Bolshevik, Stalinist, Enverian methods of these politicians.

The introductory citation of this work belongs to a one-liner from a famous Albanian telecomedy that was played during the communist regime, but it has also circulated as a kind of metaphor in the Albanian public opinion, to show or explain what happened with Albanian political elites during the period of democratic transition. So, the fact that since these political leaders have spent a good part of their lives under the communist regime (where they were formed culturally, intellectually, and morally under that regime), still after their release from “prison”, they do not they could do nothing but reflect the same mentality and the same traits of behaviour as the communists. Of course, since they were now operating in a different political, social and economic context, as the “curtains” were already raised for the world, these politicians had to somehow moderate their behaviours and strategies. But, in essence, no matter how “democratic” they try to appear, they continue to remain communists or neo-communists in their mentality.

Applying this concept (communist mentality) or explaining through it (almost) any kind of phenomenon, problem, behaviour that contradicts the ideal of democracy and prevents it from developing, is problematic in itself. The aim of this paper is to highlight, through a systematic analysis, the shortcomings and weaknesses of the use of the concept of “communist mentality”, a concept so much used in Albanian public, political and journalistic life that it is taken for granted and not even questioned by anyone. This paper aims to undertake a critique of this existing line of thought, arguing that the concept of communist mentality is not valid to explain the behaviour of Albanian politicians and the lack of their democratic culture in general.

The Concept of “Communist Mentality” as a Culturalist Explanation

Regarding the concept of “communist mentality” it must be said that there is no precise and single definition of this concept, for which it is generally agreed by scholars what it means. Likewise, there is no agreement in the literature on any particular characteristic of what it means to be a communist, to have a communist mentality, etc. Therefore, this does not help us in our intention in this paper to analyse the application of this concept as something that generally explains the behaviour of Albanian politicians, and which is thought to be an obstacle to the democratization of Albania. In the absence of a precise and “scientific” definition, accepted as such by scholars, to which we could refer and compare it with the way the “communist mentality” is used in Albania, the main task/aim of this paper is to analyse in itself the use (or misuse) of this concept in the Albanian case.

The concept of “communist mentality” was developed in the Albanian public, media, and political discourse (but also in other former communist countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union) to explain the idea that the long years lived under the communist system has produced a kind of inherited personality or mentality, with some values or norms of behaviour that are typical for the time of a totalitarian (communist) regime, but that continue to appear characteristically even in other regimes (in this case, in democratic systems. It should be noted that the “communist mentality” in itself does not constitute a specific academic analytical category but is a concept that is treated under the framework of political culture and the “communist legacy” of countries that have experienced this form of regime. So, we will treat the idea of the communist legacy as part of the culturalist paradigm, which views the development of democracy as linked to political culture. Thus, in this aspect, the concept of “communist mentality” must be seen and understood in the context of political culture.

The concept of political culture refers to the predisposing traits, the inner state of individuals, which predisposes them to react to certain stimuli in particular ways (Mayer et al., 2003: p. 14). In summary, the dimensions of the concept of political culture include *attitudes* (a psychological orientation towards political objects, which often incorporate normative conceptions of *how things should be*); *beliefs* (concepts of how things are, which may or may not be correct); *feelings*; *values*, etc. (Mayer et al., 2003: p. 16). In the cases of Eastern and Central European countries that had experienced decades under communist rule, it is assumed that a certain communist mentality manifested in certain attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs was rooted. Thus, it was argued that a pattern of attitudes and behaviours in the recently freed, post-communist countries is hypothesized as a post-communist syndrome [or mentality] ... The syndrome is viewed as a direct result of long-lasting, oppressive rule and suggests a host of individual and social disorders: learned helplessness, specific manifestations of immorality/incivility, lack of civic culture and civic virtues (Klipcerova & Feierabend & Hofstetter, 1997: p. 39). In the same way, Willemans expresses the idea that, “the communist doctrine succeeded in shaping a specific mentality amongst the people, to deform their thinking... This mentality has had and still has a lot of influence on economics and politics in the former socialist countries. Till today mistrust, unreliability, lack of confidence and looking for protective umbrella’s is to be traced in specific events” (Willemans, 2000) of the past that continue to influence the present.

Furthermore, in their famous comparative study of five different nations, Almond and Verba, in the model they offer

for *Civic Culture*, which basically according to them should essentially distinguish the cultures of “successful” democracies those that are less successful, they mention some important cultural components, such as - *the ways in which political elites make decisions, their norms and attitudes, as well as the norms and attitudes of the ordinary citizen, his relation to government and to his fellow citizens* (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 3). In general, the purpose of this comparative study of these culturalist authors is to address the attention and highlight the importance of these attitudes, norms, and subjective values, of the elites and the population as a whole, for the stabilization of democratic regimes and the participation in democratic model. After all, these authors tell us that to achieve this goal, - “it will require more than the formal institutions of democracy – universal suffrage, the political party, the elective legislature” (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 3). Preconditions or cultural qualities are also needed, which are necessary or, at least, supportive of the structures of political democracy. The structures sanctioned and defined in the constitution, after all, do not operate in a vacuum, but in a context of social and cultural factors, which influence how those political structures function (Mayer et al., 2003: p. 40).

Generally, in the case of the difficult Albanian transition during these three decades, these cultural factors (inherited from the previous communist regime) of the political elites are given as an explanation to show the failures of democracy in this country. The purpose of this paper is to make a theoretical and ideological analysis of this discourse that exists in the public debate on the “communist mentality” of Albanian politicians, aiming to show: what is meant by this communist mentality in the Albanian case by authors/analysts who are considered in the section below; what are the different dimensions/characteristics that they attach to this concept, etc. And a second regard here would be what aspects of Albanian democracy threaten or hinder this “communist mentality” of politicians, therefore what are its consequences?

A Review of the Dimensions of the “Communist Mentality” of Albanian Politicians and the Consequences It Produces for Democracy According to Analysts / Authors

In general, the implicit or even explicit presupposition advocated by various authors is that there is a communist mentality or syndrome inherited from the previous totalitarian regime, which has influenced with all its distortions the “new” political elites who lead democratic changes in post-communist countries. Thus, “totalitarian societies produced a ‘totalitarian syndrome’, a specific pattern of cognitions, attitudes and behaviours developed in order to adapt to life under totalitarian circumstances” (Klipcerova & Feierabend & Hofstetter, 1997: p. 39). Regarding this political culture inherited from the previous regime, one author states: “Albania’s political culture was built over the course of 50 years through the use of propaganda, press, music, art, literature, cinematography and was preserved and cultivated through the organizations and unions that were the extension of the Communist Party. The existing political culture today has not changed obstructing the country’s democratization” (Pajo, 2017: p. 132). The influence from this totalitarian past, or this inherited communist mentality/syndrome, has been the main factor, according to the various authors/analysts we take in the analysis in this section, that has hindered the building of a well-functioning and institutionalized democracy in Albania. Meksi emphasizes this when he says that: “The survival of the people in politics and of the communist mentality, the nostalgia for that time is making a prolongation of the transition with all its negative aspects, making the Albanians to lose hope for a better life” (Meksi, 2009).

Fatos Lubonja, an Albanian analyst and opinionist, expresses this idea through a metaphor: “*whoever has lived in slavery [under the communist system] will inevitably have undergone such distortions which will not allow him to be fully worthy of another system*” (Lubonja, 2006, p. 16-17). Through this metaphor, Lubonja tries to explain what happened to the Albanian political elites in the period of democratic transition. He states: “*We built the worst democracy and the worst possible capitalism, precisely because the people who took it over had suffered such psychological, cultural and moral distortions that they display to this day, often in same ugly and evil forms*” (Lubonja, 2006, p. 16-17).

Concerning the different dimensions attributed to the communist mentality of Albanian politicians of the post-communist period and the various consequences it has produced, the authors (quoted below) list: *The rise of the cults of political leaders; the mindset that unites the party with the state; the desire for unlimited power and to suppress any dissenting voice (the authoritarianism of political leaders); the treatment of the political opponent as an enemy, the extreme polarization of the political life in the country; misuse of public funds and corruption, etc.*

Regarding what can be mentioned as the first dimension of the “communist mentality”, the authors state the creation or re-fabrication of new cults of the individual in the leaders of the main political parties. These cults characterize the main political leaders of the transition period in Albania, just as in the past they characterized figures like Enver Hoxha. And this is what Andrea Stefani means when he addresses the figures of Fatos Nano and Sali Berisha by saying: “*For leaders with a sculpted, iron, and ruthless cult as that of Enver Hoxha. People who show the same thirst and need for cheers of crowds as the dictatorship propaganda did yesterday*” (Stefani, 2005: p. 74). And with these cults of new leaders is emphasized the idea of their infallibility, the idea that they are irrefutable or that those who follow them must obey them. “*They [the cults] exert pressure for submission to the people who surround the “prominent” man ... by suffocating to the last cell if possible, all that spirit of opposition and freedom that is the soul of any democracy*” (Stefani, 2005: p. 138).

What is most often understood through these “cults” that the chief leaders of the dominant Albanian political parties have built around them, is the authoritarian behaviour they carry. Thus, their authoritarian tendencies, both in how they run their parties and the affairs of the state, are explained as a consequence of “*their sophisticated carrying of communist*

mentalities, which makes them to strive not for freedom, but to rule". (Stefani, 2005: p. 69). The profile of the leader in these 27 years of democracy is the same: the one of the authoritarian type (Pajo, 2017: p. 134). And the authoritarianism of Albanian politicians, in this case, a consequence of the communist mentality to rule everything and absolutely, according to the ideas of the authors has also caused the lack of real democracy in the internal life of Albanian political parties (lack of real competition inside the party); the fact they are run authoritatively by a single hand or a very small group of people around the leader (excluding party forums or their membership); that there is a tendency to exclude or "stifle" critical voices within the party; or that there is a spirit of submission and servility within these parties. Andrea Stefani expresses this idea when he talks about the organization of the two main parties in the country and says that: *"the two largest and dominant parties of life in Albania (SP and DP) remain invincible castles of Nano and Berisha. Leninist-type parties with new names, parties of monolithic unity around the leader, parties of subjugated majorities, and servant party forums have been the powerful weapon of the invincible survival of Nano and Berisha."* (Stefani, 2005: p. 22-23). It is assumed from these words of the author, his attempt to highlight that spirit of authoritarianism and submission that exists in the inner life of Albanian political parties, and the attempt to explain them through that communist mentality inherited from the past of Albanian politicians.

Another element of the concept of "communist mentality", from which Albanian politicians are presumed to suffer, is the mentality according to which it identifies or unites the party with the state. Hence, using the same methods or practices of the former (communist) state party. Fatos Lubonja describes this when he talks about the ruling Socialist Party: *"It is difficult to say that it [SP] is detached from the mentality that identifies the party with the state and from the practices of the state party. The shadow of the state party which controls everything, although not brutally and directly as Berisha did [in the years 1992 -1997] remains in Albania"* (Lubonja, 2000: p. 13). Another author, Mustafa Nano, adopts the concept of the former party-state to explain (in his way) the failures of Albanian democracy. *"The concept of the state party is the most visible part of the legacy that the Hoxha regime passed on to us nowadays. Infection with this political theory has spared almost no one. All politicians do not leave a chance without proving this. ...In the years of the Democratic Party rule, its devaluation and political degeneration, went in proportion to the attempts to turn it into a state party. There came a moment when this party was merged with the state to such an extent that the overthrow from the power of the DP could not but bring the fall of the state"*. (Nano, 2001: p. 15). Here, too, we note the elaboration of the idea by the author that the lack of division between party and state, viz, the fact that party militants are employed in the state administration, or that state institutions are dependent on or controlled by the party, is a consequence of the communist legacy. And this is part of the communist mentality of Albanian politicians. In Andrea Stefani, we also find explicitly this idea of the communist mentality of the state party. *"Historical" leaders have become an obstacle to the democratization of the country because they carry the communist mentality of the state party; they want to rule everything by giving power only to their followers. They implement where they can and as much as possible the practices of the state party by distributing their loyalists at the strategic points, all over the top of the state, to rule it "* (Stefani, 2005: p. 144). So, we can also see here the attempt to explain militancy in the state administration with the practices of the former (communist) state party.

Likewise, another element of the "communist mentality" inherited from the communist past, according to the authors, is the desire for power of politicians, or their tendencies to control or usurp all power they can. Andrea Stefani argues this when he says: *"At the beginning of pluralism when they felt the taste of power, the "democratic" leaders (without having any new philosophy or vision) began to copy what they overthrew: the Communist Party of Enver Hoxha. "This is a 'betrayal' to the principles of democracy, as the author calls it, as a consequence of their communist mentality"* (Stefani, 2005: p. 136, 148). This idea is also put forward by Miranda Vickers and James Petiffer when they try to explain the actions of Berisha in power during the years '92 -96. *"His tendencies to grab all power, relying only on a few loyalists, led him to savage measures against his political opponents, who many remembered the actions of Enver Hoxha. "Many saw in Berisha another one-party ruler"* (Vickers & Petiffer, 2007: p. 137-138). While Mustafa Nano comments on this argument: *"Sali Berisha [even after he came to power in 2005] has been, is and will remain an exalted, pathetic and incorrigible Bolshevik, a man who lustfully bleeds power, a paranoid dragged by wild passions, a dangerous prime minister, a machine that produces enemies one by one"* (Nano, 2006: p. 17). We can understand from these words of the author his idea about the communist mentality. So, first, it is a lust for power on the part of politicians, to control it. Second, he is also an aggressive lust that is ready to "bleed" to retain power. And third, the communist mentality, according to this author, also means political paranoia that produces endless enemies. So, there is a return to the mentality or the inquisition that frequently produces enemies.

And here we can come to another dimension of the "communist mentality" of politicians: the mentality according to which it sees the opponent, or treats him as an enemy, seeks him to disappear from the "face of the earth". And this is another important element that the authors elaborate on when talking about the communist mentality of Albanian politicians. Thus, e.g., Elez Biberaj, referring to the May 1996 parliamentary elections in Albania, said: *"Under the influence of the culture inherited from communism, the leaders of the government and the opposition showed that they did not understand the rules of representative democracy, seeing politics as a zero-sum game, in which the winner takes it all and the loser loses it all"* (Biberaj, 2001: p. 471). And with the same argument, the author, in his book "Albania in Transition", explains the events that occurred in the Albanian political scene during the period of social unrest in 1997. *"Inspired by the communist traditions of intolerance and fierce class struggle, they (politicians of the time) showed no respect for democratic procedures or discussions and saw politics only as a war arena. "The instincts of the former elites, their communist mentality, customs, and views had remained almost intact"* (Biberaj, 2001: p. 498). We can understand from these lines the argument of the author, who also tries to explain the behaviour of Albanian politicians, the lack of respect for democratic procedures, the spirit of intolerance or lack of cooperation between them, in the context of their communist mentality.

Another significant outcome produced by the "communist mentality" of Albanian politicians, according to the authors,

is what we can call the polarization of political life in the country. A political polarization that goes to the limits of hostility between the parties, and which is not infrequently explained by these authors as *a direct inheritance of the communist mentality of class warfare* and the spirit of intolerance it produces. Andrea Stefani notes this idea when he says: “*One of the most disgusting features of today’s Albanian politics - a direct inheritance of the communist mentality of class warfare - is the accusation “enemy of the people” that party leaders make to each other*” (Stefani, 2005: p. 73). A primitive phase of political struggle, according to the author, that takes the form of class warfare with pronounced doses of nationalism. Similarly, Rexhep Qosja, another author perhaps more important because of his personality as an academic, does not hesitate to explain in the same way the behaviour of Albanian politicians in the Assembly (referring to the period in May 2010). “*There is no doubt that a Stalinist mentality prevails in the Albanian Parliament, both in the behaviour and in the discussions of the protagonists of this Assembly. What are those lynchings of political opponents in this assembly, other than the typical Stalinist lynchings of political opponents? The Albanian Parliament has not forgotten to behave like the Politburo of the USSR, that of communist Albania, and other former communist countries. When the communist leader decided to settle accounts with his main opponent, when he saw him as a competitor in the power struggle, he first buried him politically and morally in the Politburo. The hand of the law, the iron of the law, the iron of the will are how these “democrats” will settle accounts with the political opponents, declared enemies of Albania ... Typical Stalinist political linguistic cattle*” (Qosja, 2010: p. 19-20). We can see in these lines of these authors, their attempt to explain the behavior of Albanian politicians towards each other, the spirit of intolerance that exists between them, the mutual accusations they exchange, or even the language they use, as a consequence of the communist mentality that they “possess”.

Finally, another problem of the Albanian society during the period of its transition, which has to do with the endemic corruption spread at all levels and political institutions, also is often treated as a consequence of the “communist mentality” inherited from Albanian politicians. Misuse of public funds and corruption are also explained by the legacy of the communist mentality of Albanian politicians. Fatos Lubonja explicitly expresses this in one of his writings when he emphasizes that: “*What continues to be fed by the old feudal-communist trunk in this monster is the mentality of the ruler who does as he pleases with the public funds, the privileges he enjoys, even that of not being equal with other citizens in front of the law*” (Lubonja, 2004b: p. 11). So, the roots of the problem of abuse and the benefits associated with the public office continue to be “fed by the old feudal-communist trunk” according to Fatos Lubonja. After all, “Communism, with the privilege of a minority, with the disruption of equality in rights and opportunities, created the idea that some favors are allowed to some peoples and not to others” (Meksi, 2009).

A Critique to the Discourse on the “Communist Mentality” and Some Alternative Explanations for the Behaviour of Albanian Politicians

So far, through the discourse analysis, we have made a summary of the main ideas and dimensions that different authors or analysts in the Albanian public discourse and media have made for the concept of “communist mentality”. It can be said that the argument of the “communist mentality” in the Albanian media and public space is so “alive” and dominant, that it has “extinguished” any other explanatory alternative for the behaviour of Albanian politicians and the lack of democratic culture in them. This section offers a critique of this dominant discourse in the Albanian public space, arguing that the concept of communist mentality is not very valuable in explaining the behaviour of Albanian politicians and their lack of democratic culture in general. This critique is based firstly on the conceptual plane, so it will be a critique “from within” of the argument that it is the communist mentality that explains all the other variables (consequences), highlighting the gaps, ambiguity, the incoherence of the argument, as well as the lack of clear evidence in this discourse which proves the cause-and-effect relationship (how do we know that it is precisely from the communist mentality that the behaviour of our politician’s stems?). This critique “from within” of the application of this concept of communist mentality will be followed by a second part, a critique in the empirical plan, which will try to argue through alternative explanations where do these negative effects attributed to the “communist mentality” come from (such as the behaviour of our politicians, their authoritarianism, the lack of a healthy democratic culture in them, etc.).

Conceptually, the “communist mentality” can be said to be an empty concept in itself, not clearly defined by those who use it in public or media debates. In most cases, we can understand or imply from the use of this concept simply *a mental predisposition, or behavior of Albanian politicians with authoritarian tendencies*, but nothing more than this. It is a tautological concept in itself: the communist mentality is defined as an authoritarian mentality (a predisposition of authoritarian behaviour of politicians) and then it is argued that the communist mentality produces authoritarianism. This is an empty argument in itself, a circular and tautological thought that at the end of the day gets to the conclusion that authoritarianism is produced by the authoritarian mentality of politicians. Here, actually, it is highlighted only the authoritarianism of Albanian politicians, or it is identified their authoritarian tendencies, but this does not mean that the “truth” of the communist mentality has been found.

Thus e.g. whether authors and analysts try often in their writings to explain the lack of internal democracy in the life of Albanian political parties (submission, exclusion of critical voices, or the lack of real competition in these parties) as a consequence of “*communist mentalities carried by their leaders*” [Nano, Berisha, Rama], or through “*the cults they have raised and their metastases*” (Stefani, 2005: pp. 69, 111), at the end of the day, the same authors, come to conclusions with phrases such as: “*Authoritarian control of Berisha and Nano are currently the spirit of PD and SP*” (Stefani, 2005: p. 262); or that “*with Berisha’s*

personality we mean the phenomenon of authoritarianism in the form of concentration of power in the hands of one man" (Lubonja, 2004a). Hence, we see in this public and media debate that exists in Albania, to equate the communist mentality with the authoritarian mentality of politicians, and then it is argued that the communist mentality produces authoritarianism, or even simpler, that the authoritarianism of Albanian politicians is produced by their authoritarian mentality. And exactly this makes it an empty argument, a circular reasoning, which does not help us much to understand and explain the reality of democracy that exists in Albania.

Also, another argument I would like to present here to show the invalidity of the concept of "communist mentality" as a factor to explain the behaviour of Albanian politicians, is the lack of evidence or proof that proves this cause-and-effect relationship. As evidenced from the references above in this paper, the argument that the communist mentality explains the behaviour of Albanian politicians, or that it produces the failure of democracy in Albania is taken for granted by the authors who raise this issue, but none of these authors (beyond simple rhetoric) does not give us a clear and evident proof to prove this cause-and-effect relationship, e.g. the fact that it is precisely the "communist mentality" of politicians that hinder the democratization of Albania, or the fact that Albanian politicians of the transition period have borrowed their behaviour from the previous communist period.

Often in the literature on the "communist mentality" by these authors, it is argued by making historical analogies between the behaviour of Albanian politicians of the transition period and those of the ruling communists from 1945 to 1991, that there are similarities in some behaviours between them. In this paper, it is not denied that there are some similarities between them, although in subtle forms. Here we can mention: the authoritarianism of the party leaders in the way they run their parties and the affairs of the state, the "suffocation" of critical voices within the party, lack of development of parliamentarism, the banishment from the party of those who do not "obey", the lack of a culture of tolerance in general instead of finding ways to compromise with the political opponent, attempts to set up personal dictatorships surrounded by their loyalists, thirst for power, attempts to usurp the independence of institutions and other uncontrolled powers, misuse of public funds, corruption and other negative phenomena in this regard. But, these similarities in these behavioural habits do not necessarily tell us that they are borrowed exactly from the former communists, that these behavioural characteristics have their source precisely in this communist legacy, and thus, also in the communist mentality. Similarity and borrowing are two different concepts, which do not necessarily coincide with each other.

Thus, to give some alternative explanations regarding the meaning of the features of the authoritarian behaviours of the politicians or the above-mentioned negative phenomena, we could begin by arguing that such behavioural traits of our politicians attributed to the communist mentality have existed even before, much earlier the communist period to which the authors refer. Thus e.g. *the Bolshevik lust and mentality of our politicians, the re-fabrication of individual cults by them, the state party concept* (as constituent elements of the inherited "communist mentality" of politicians) are not very valuable to explain to us phenomena such as authoritarianism, political monopoly of the rule by leaders, their attempts to set up personal dictatorships surrounded by their loyalists, usurpation of independent institutions, etc., as these phenomena existed even before the communist period in Albania.

Thus e.g., Ahmet Zogu, the former ruler of Albania before the communist period, was also a man who "created a personal dictatorship, in which he represented the only way to success for all who wanted to make a political career" (Fischer, 2004, p. 171). Likewise, we can see in Zogu's period that he showed the same authoritarian tendencies as "the concentration of power in his own hands and in the people he trusted, the centralization and strengthening of executive power" (Fischer, 2004, p. 89), or "the control he exercised entirely over the cabinet, appointing and dismissing all ministers at his discretion; he also controlled the Assembly, the Senate (appointing half of the latter members), as well as appointing all state officials, controlled the judiciary by appointing and dismissing judges at his will" (Fischer, 2004, p. 90). All these features authoritarian behaviour existed even before the communist period and miss their meaning when they try to be explained by the inherited communist mentality of Albanian politicians.

The lack of political culture or democratic values in the way politicians run their parties or the government cannot necessarily be associated with the "communist mentality" inherited by them. Thus, if there is a lack of democratic culture in our politicians (e.g., the fact that they behave in an authoritarian way, are intolerant to each other, create conflicts in the struggle for power, etc.) this does not necessarily tell us that it equates to their "communism". The opposite of this "lack" of democratic culture in Albanian politicians cannot be just their "communist mentality". Moreover, such features of authoritarian behaviour, submission, "obedience" to leaders can be seen even in the younger generations who enter politics and who have not experienced at all (or were too young) the period of communism in Albania.

Beyond this discourse on the "communist mentality", we could see the authoritarianism of Albanian politicians, or the tendencies they have to rule, deeper as a reflection of the patriarchal social structure of Albanian society. So, we could see them as a reflection of this patriarchal social structure of Albanian society, of its system of social relations and social institutions. Fatos Lubonja emphasizes this idea in one of his writings when he says that: *"Berishism and nanoism are simply a reflection of the structure of our institutions, starting from the family. In an anthropological or a cultural way of understanding, Berisha and Nano are none other than the patrons of the Albanian patriarchal clans that, according to custom, must rule until they die to hand over power to the eldest son. Of a culture, according to which, it is enough to be a member of the clan led by this godfather and you are a good man and protected no matter what you do. And this is not a feature of communism, but much earlier and, also, it is not just a feature of Nano and Berisha"* (Lubonja, 2004a). Therefore, we have the emphasis of the idea by the author that we should look in this patriarchal structure of Albanian society, in its system of social relations, where among other things we can

mention *clientelism* (if you are with me, you are protected; or if you vote for me, you will benefit!), the roots of the authoritarianism of Albanian leaders.

In the same way, it could be argued that the high conflict that exists between the main political actors during the transition period in Albania (extreme polarization of political life) has nothing to do with the “communist mentality” inherited from Albanian politicians rather than with other explanatory factors. Thus, the high conflict existing among Albanian politicians can be explained as a consequence of de-ideologization between political parties in Albania. Hence, the fact that Albanian political parties are so similar to each other, that they do not have any clear ideological differences between them, whether in their domestic or foreign policy, they consequently in a way “create” this conflict to distinguish from each other. This argument is best emphasized by Kajsiu: “Unable to build a vision of society based on certain groups or social strata, or based on an ideological universe, Albanian political parties build the vision of society in relation to a threat, symbolized by the opposing party. It is in the face of this threat that they articulate and represent the “people”. The political opponent is the negativity that does not allow society to do as it imagines itself” (Kajsiu, 2007, p. 18). Therefore, according to the author, we must find in this lack of difference in ideology between the parties, to the “need” they have to create this difference between them and in the articulation that they make to the “people” in relation to the threat or danger that is presented by the opponent, the reasons from where this high conflict in Albanian politics originates. Also, it is understood from this point of view why politics often degenerates into fierce and banal conflicts. Furthermore, the author continues this argument by saying: “This is where the high levels of polarization, conflict, and exclusion in Albanian politics lie, more than in the essence of an anti-democratic culture or the psychology of particular politicians” (Kajsiu, 2007, p. 18).

Conclusions

In this paper, I argued that the thesis proclaimed by various Albanian authors or analysts to explain the behavior of Albanian politicians of the transition period based on their “communist mentality” is not valid in itself. This thesis of the “communist mentality” of politicians that is presented in the Albanian media and public debate is not only misused in a good part of the cases by the authors or analysts (sometimes it even ends up explaining [almost] everything with the logic of “communist mentality”), but also shows enough ambiguity and shortcomings to explain the reality of politics and democratization in Albania. First, the concept of “communist mentality” is not clearly defined by those who present it in the media and public debate. In most cases, we can understand from the use of this concept simply a mental predisposition, or behaviour of politicians with authoritarian tendencies, but nothing more than that. Thus, the application of this concept highlights the authoritarian tendencies of Albanian politicians of the transition period, but this does not necessarily mean that the “truth” of their communist mentality is found. The lack of clear evidence to prove this cause-and-effect relationship, ie the fact that - it is precisely this communist mentality that determines their behavior, or that Albanian politicians of the transition period have borrowed their behavior from the period former communist - is another point that was emphasized in this paper. We saw in the case of the aforementioned authors that this cause-and-effect relationship was taken for granted, without showing us a clear proof of it. Likewise, in this paper, it was pointed out that many of the negative features or phenomena that are attributed to the “communist mentality” (ie seen as a consequence of it), existed even earlier in time, before that communism that the authors themselves refer to. And this tells us that these features of behavior can not necessarily be explained by the concept of “communist mentality”. It also tells us the invalidity of the use of this concept as a factor that can explain the behavior of Albanian politicians or the failures in various aspects of Albanian democracy.

Bibliography

- Almond, Gabriel A. & Verba, Sidney (1963), *“The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations”*. Princeton University Press.
- Biberaj, Elez (2001), *“Shqipëria në Tranzicion”*. Tiranë: Ora.
- Fischer, Bernd J. (2004), *“Mbreti Zog dhe Përpkjka për Stabilitet në Shqipëri”*. Tiranë: Çabej.
- Kajsiu, Blendi (2007), *“Vdekje Politikës, Liri Popullit! Kriza e Përfaqësimit në Shqipëri”* Tiranë: Revista Polis Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 5-25.
- Klicperova, Martina & Feyrabend Ivo K. & Hofstetter, C. Richard (1997), *“In the Search for a Post-Communist Syndrome: A Theoretical Framework and Empirical Assessment”*. Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, Vol. 7, p. 39-52.
- Lubonja, Fatos (2000, 5 November), *“Partia Shtet dhe Partia Socialiste”*. Tiranë: Shekulli, p. 13.
- Lubonja, Fatos (2004a, September), *“Edhe një Herë mbi Berishizmin dhe Nanoizmin”*. Tiranë: Korrieri, nr. 227, Shtator 2004.
- Lubonja, Fatos (2004b, 26 December), *“Nga Feudalët Komunistë te Feudalët Liberalistë”*. Tiranë: Korrieri, 26 Dhjetor 2004. p. 11.
- Lubonja, Fatos (2006, 28 June), *“Pse Ngulmoj për Ndërrimin e Elitave”*. Tiranë: Korrieri, p. 16-17.
- Mayer, Lawrence C. & Burnett, John H. & Ogden, Susane & Tuman, John P. (2003), *“Politikat Krahasuese”*. Tiranë: Ora.
- Meksi, Aleksander (2009, 19 July), *“Parodi e Antikomunizmit apo Nostalgji e Komunizmit”*. Tiranë: Gazeta Shqiptare.
- Nano, Mustafa, (2001, 6 April), *“Demokracia e Njëpërkëmbur nga Partia-shtet”*. Tiranë: Shekulli, p. 15.
- Nano, Mustafa (2006, 6 April), *“Andrenalina e Rindezur e një Bolsheviku Paranojak”*. Tiranë: Korrieri, p. 17.

- Pajo, Matilda (2017), "*The Features of Political Culture in Postcommunist Albania*". Thesis, p. 115-141. Available at <https://dspace.aab-edu.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/1144/07.%20The%20features%20of%20political%20culture%20in%20post-communist%20Albania%20-%20Matilda%20Pajo.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> [Last accessed on 29th May 2021]
- Qosja, Rexhep (2010, 18 May), "*Kuvend Demokratik, apo Politbyro Politike*". Tiranë: Gazeta Shqiptare, p. 19-20.
- Stefani, Andrea (2005), "*Albanistan*". Tiranë: Toena.
- Vickers, Miranda & Pettifer, James (2007), "*Çështja Shqiptare. Reformësimi i Ballkanit*". Tiranë: Bota Shqiptare.
- Willemans, Diederik (2000), "*The Homo Sovieticus Mentality. The Failure of Socialism and its Consequences*". Term Paper. Available at <https://www.grin.com/document/97817> [Last accessed on 29th May 2021].