

The modernization process in Albania: education and the political stability of the country

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Abstract

Modernization, as a process involving multidimensional changes in the social, economic and political systems of a community, has also had a significant impact in the post-communist Albania. Besides the obvious political changes that this country went through following the end of the 80's and early 90's, other sectors of the social system were also subject to substantial reforms in the framework of democratization. The latter has had a determining impact in the whole political system starting by the change of the political regime to the reconfiguration of political institutions, the review of political procedures, etc. The success of all this political process of change, as well as all the other changes in the social and economic systems of Albania depend considerably on the levels of the political stability of the country. That is why, this paper focuses on the study of education in Albania, as an aspect which accompanied the modernization process and its impact on the political stability.

Therefore, the rationale that this paper uses considers education as an important indicator closely related to the overall political stability. In other words, this means that an educated youth, with much more opportunities to attend higher education is more likely to get organized in order to fulfill its aspirations and expectations. It is this forms of organization that become determinant to the political stability of a country.

The paper makes use of quantitative and qualitative data in trying to analyse the role of the education system and especially of higher education on the Albanian political stability. These two types of data are used in: first, providing a general framework of the modernisation process in education; second, presenting the role that the youth has had in Albania during the post-communist period focusing on the different forms of political participation and the ways how their expectations and aspirations have been answered by the political system, third, analysing the political stability of the country and the relationship between education and the political stability.

Key words: modernization, education, political stability, democratization, higher education.

Introduction

Higher education is crucial to the prosperity and development of a country. It is one of those dimensions where the governments put more emphasis on, because of the nature of the public good produced. This means that the relationship between politics and education is mutual. This mutuality is in terms of support from the political system towards education as a subsystem of the social system and the increase of quality of the workforce which also impacts the economic growth of a country. Galston argues that *democracies require democratic citizens, whose specific knowledge, competences, and character*

would not be as well suited to nondemocratic politics (Galston, 2001, pg. 217).

What is interesting in this relationship is the fact that the success of the democratic political system, in terms of all the institutional framework and the interaction and output among them is considerably dependent on how the public perceives, absorbs and analyses them. Thus, our expectation is that the citizens play an important role in maintaining the political system and its well-functioning, which if we go further means that, a well-educated youth will help the political system's general stability.

The democratization processes in Albania from communism to democracy have also urged the need for structural and organizational reforms in education as in other services of the public sector. The purpose of the educational national service is to equip future Albanian citizens with proper knowledge, adequate skills and capacities, as well as commitment to the implementation of the economic development of the national plan. (World Data on Education, 2010/11, MOES, November 2008). Furthermore, the National Strategy for Higher Education 2008-2013 emphasizes that *Albania needs well-educated citizens and a capable workforce, in order to build a society of the future, based on knowledge*. (National Strategy for Higher Education 2008-2013, pg. 6).

Thus, a very important question stems from the democratization processes that the country has gone through, these 20 years of post-communism and the changes it has produced on the education policy:

Which is the relationship between the overall political stability of the system and education in Albania? Taking in consideration the high emphasis put by the decision-makers on education, this study provides an analyses of the education sector seen from the political stability point of view. By shedding light on this important relationship, we try to further advance this study by illustrating the education rates (with a special focus on the higher education) parallel to levels of political stability in Albania during the last decade.

Recent literature in Albania, including reports and other institutional documents, focuses mainly on the general reforms, structure of higher education, and the national educational framework in terms of data such as: student enrollment, level of payrolls, number of private and public universities, annual budgetary allocations, etc. By elaborating on these data, we try to provide a more specific analysis of the topic.

The paper follows by offering a general framework of education in Albania during the post-communist period by mainly focusing on developments after the years 2000'. Then, it proceeds with the issue of political participation in the framework of education and the impact of education on the country's political stability. Finally, we finish with some conclusions concerning the topic.

By means of this analysis, the paper provides a new perspective to the evaluation of the output of the education system in the maintenance or disequilibrium of political stability, contrasting much of the academic literature which has mainly been focused on the relationship between education and the economy.

Education in Albania

Dewey defines education as the requirement for people to see outside traditional and cultural barriers, and thus define

their individual interests as tied to a broader community of concerns (Dewey, 1916).

After the fall of the communist regime, education in Albania has followed the general trend of democratic reforms as other public sectors. These reforms concerning the general structure and organization of higher education are under implementation as they are also in compliance with the country's objectives towards European integration.

The vision of Albania within the framework of the National Strategy for Development and Integration 2007-2013, is that of a country with high living standards, which is integrated in the European and Euro-Atlantic structures, is democratic and guarantees the fundamental human rights and liberties. (World Data on Education, 2010/1: Albania, UNESCO, pg.2). Within this general vision, education is considered vital in responding to the demands of the Albanian domestic market where a very important role is played by higher education.

The legal framework which regulates the higher education system is the Law No. 9741, dated 21.05.2007, "On the Higher Education in the Republic of Albania", (as amended). The structure and organization of higher education provided by this law fully complies with one of the most important strategies in the education sector in Albania. This is the *National Strategy on Higher Education 2008-2013 (NSHE)*. Considering higher education as essential to the social and economic development of the country (in compliance with the National Strategy for Development and Integration), NSHE provides five strategic priorities. They are:

- a) The enlargement of the system to meet the domestic needs regarding fulfillment of EU integration standards (on the indicators of tertiary education for the population), granting access to higher education for all those who want to pursue that path.
- b) Guaranteeing a variety of study programs offered in compliance with the needs of the potential development of the country.
- c) The improvement of the quality of teaching and knowledge acquisition in the higher education system through the continuing development of human resources and quality.
- d) The improvement of governing mechanisms through the development of higher education institution's autonomy regarding the increase of the management quality with accountability and transparency in order to make them really function as public institutions.
- e) The adaption of methods and financial levels in order to stimulate the whole system and enable the fulfillment of general objectives (NSHE, pg.7).

The developments that took place in the higher education following the democratization processes from the 1990s and on, can be categorized into two main periods. The first period, from 1990-2000 was characterized mainly by transitional reforms which were also being applied in other public sectors of the Albanian society in order to make the transition to democracy as smooth as possible (Open Data Albania, 2012). However, challenges were present especially in the limited number of students allowed to attend higher education. In response to this need, the first period of changes and reforms was characterized by the establishment of other universities in other cities of the country, besides the University of Tirana which was founded following the 1960's.

During the first years of 2000's, other elements started to surge in this climate of structural and organizational reforms influenced by the possibility that the university staffs had for visits abroad. The birth of private universities brought about a considerable increase in terms of student enrollment rates in public universities. (MoES, 2012). It was a governmental priority during this period to offer education to everyone who wanted to attend the university. As a result, enrollment rates both in public and private universities considerably increased. The general trends in students' enrollment rates both in private and public universities are shown in the table below:

Table 1. The expansion of higher education in Albania (Thousands)

Academic year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Gross enrollment rate (%)	18.4	21.6	24.7	28.2	29.2	29.9	37.3
Enrolled students	53.3	63.3	74.8	86.9	90.2	92.7	116.1
Full-time (public)	36.2	42.2	50.6	58.9	62.3	61.3	76.8
Part-time (public)	16.6	20.1	22.5	22.2	18.4	18.6	19.0
Private	0.4	1.0	1.7	5.8	9.5	12.7	20.3
New entrants	13.9	14.1	16.5	21.0	21.0	25.0	26.8
Public	13.7	13.5	15.7	16.7	17.2	19.2	19.9
Private	0.3	0.6	0.8	4.4	3.8	5.8	6.9
Number of students graduating	6.0	6.3	8.4	9.9	14.2	14.8	n/a
Public	6.0	6.3	8.4	9.6	13.9	14.4	n/a
Private	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.4	0.4	n/a
Teaching staff	4.0	4.5	5.5	5.8	6.1	6.9	7.6
Private students as % of total	0.8	1.5	2.3	6.6	10.5	13.7	17.5
Private enrollments as % of total	1.9	4.2	4.8	20.7	18.2	23.3	25.6

Note: Gross enrollment ratio is shows students as a proportion of population 18-25 years old.

Source: World Bank, (2010). *Albania, The new growth Agenda: A Country Economic Memorandum Competitiveness in Albania*, pg. 22.

The organization of university studies is another important element when analyzing higher education. It supplies the decision-making process with valuable data on university attendance, degrees offered, flexibility and mobility of the system, etc. In 2003, Albania signed the Bologna Declaration, and as a result has organized the higher education system according to the main principles that this document provides. Following the signing of this European document, higher education studies in Albania are organized into three cycles which is also reflected in the law "On Higher Education in the Republic of Albania". *The first cycle of studies comprises 180 ECTS and lasts 3 years. Upon graduation, students are awarded the Diploma of First Level (DFL) (Bachelor) in their field of study. The second cycle of studies comprises 120 ECTS and last 2 years. Upon graduation, students are awarded a Diploma of Second Level (DSL) (Masters of Science) in the field of study or an Integrated Diploma of Second Level (IDSL) in integrated studies. The Second Cycle also includes a program of study which encompasses 60 credits and last one year. Upon completion, students obtain the Professional Master Diploma in the relevant field of study. The third cycle of studies is academic and research oriented. Upon completion of the third cycle, graduates are awarded the doctorate degree (PhD).*

(Albania Answers to EC Questionnaire, Chapter 26, pg. 3215, also the Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Albania, chapter IV, article 26.)

Besides the organizational structure and changes that this sector has gone through, it is also important to give see it from the economic point of view. By trying to provide some considerations on the weight that this sector has had on the budget of the country, we can also reflect how this sector is perceived by the political decision-makers in terms of the importance it has for the political system.

When it comes to developing countries such as Albania, the contribution of higher education to development becomes a determinant factor. This attitude has been also reflected in the World Bank policy for higher education, which emphasizes the contribution of the tertiary education to elements, such as: a qualified workforce, access to the world markets and new knowledge as well as the stimulation of new knowledge. (World Bank, 1994).

Sources of education funding in Albania include (a) the central budget; (b) contributions from local governments (i.e., municipalities); and (c) extra budgetary sources, including revenues generated from fees and

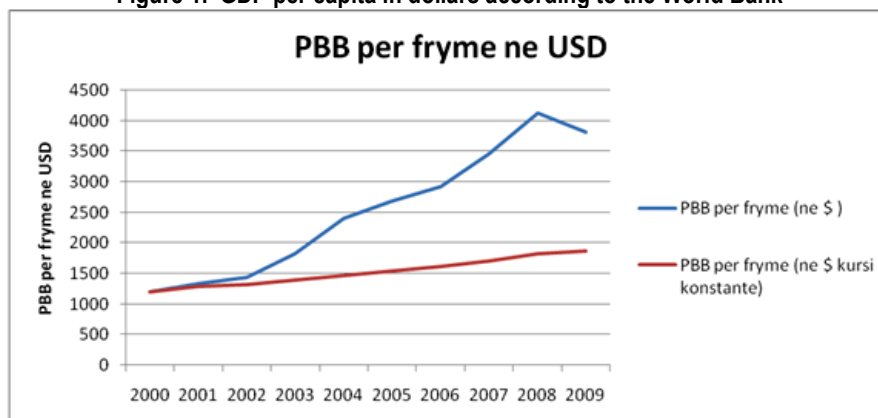
parental/community contributions. (World Bank, 2005, pg. 20). The higher education institutions which are funded by the state budget in Albania are the public universities. However, public funds are not the only funds to education. Because of the increase of costs of education and the increasing number of private universities (38 private universities in 2011 according to MOES), private spending during this last decade is also playing an important role. Thus, the public sector and the private spending are becoming the main providers of education.

A lot of research has been focused on the relationship between education and growth. Even though, the analysis of this relationship is not the focus of this paper, it is certainly important to evidence the positive correlation that exists between these two variables. As, Kahn mentions *both education and political stability are positively related to wealth or income* (Kahn, 1997, pg. 3).

Similarly, McMahon (2004) also found that *education through its contributions to economic growth has a significant influence on long-term transitions of democratization, greater respect for human rights and more economic and political stability* (Hu, 2009, pg.10).

Since 1998 Albania's economy has grown at an average six percent annually moving from a low income to an upper-middle income country. As a result, per capita rose to \$3950 in 2010, a rate of growth faster than in any other country in Central or Southeast European (World Bank, 2010, pg.1). However, GDP per capita level is still far from that of European Union countries. Its fluctuations have also been reflected in the GDP contribution to education. The following figure shows the trend of GDP per capita in Albania based on the latest data provided by the World Bank:

Figure 1. GDP per capita in dollars according to the World Bank



Source: World Bank, found at Open Data Albania, 2012.

Education expenditure shows a stable trend from the 1990's with a slight decrease nowadays. It comprised about 3.8% of the total percentage of the GDP in 1995, 3.5% in 2009, with a continuing decrease in 2011 of about 2.8% of the GDP. An important element which has influenced expenditures in education especially those per student has been the government strategy to expand access to public higher education to everyone. As a result, expenditures per student have suffered a considerable decrease since student enrollment has increased. According to the World Bank, *funding per student in higher education has fallen over time from 25 percent of GDP per capita to 20 percent between 2004 and 2009* (World Bank, 2010, pg. 20).

Table 2. Education Expenditure (Percentage Structure)

	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Basic and Preschool	61.7	58.5	60.4	62.0
Secondary General	12.1	13.0	12.7	11.7
Secondary vocational	6.6	6.7	6.2	5.8
Higher education	16.6	17.2	16.4	16.8
Administration and Science	3.0	4.6	4.3	3.6
Total % GDP	3.2	3.3	3.5	3.5

Source: *New Growth Agenda, World bank, 2010 (data from the Ministry of Education and Treasury).*

Table 3. Spending per Student as % of GDP per Capita

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Basic education	10.2	10.6	12.5	12.4	14.0	14.7
Secondary total	13.3	12.2	12.2	12.9	17.9	15.9
Secondary general	10.3	9.8	9.9	10.5	14.7	12.6
Secondary vocational	26.6	22.1	22.0	23.5	32.1	32.7
Higher education	25.4	22.4	20.9	22.3	23.0	19.7

Source: *New Growth Agenda, World bank, 2010 (data from the Ministry of Education and Treasury)*

Budgetary expenditures on higher education are considerably low considering their distribution within the whole education system. This is because only 19% of the public education funds go to higher education. The other part of funds is distributed to other levels of education. (Albania Answers to EC Questionnaire, Chapter 26, pg. 3217). According to the same source, *there exists a positive sustainable trend of public funding, (according to mid-term projections for 2010 -2012) which aims at matching the public funding ratio in education to GDP to that of other countries in the region and beyond.* Even though there have been taken some measures in increasing this ratio, it still remains low.

Since private spending is becoming a determining factor to higher education both in public and private higher education institutions, this category of expenditures needs to be taken in consideration as well. The reduction in public spending in education, as shown by Table 3, has led to an increase in private expenditures. According to the World Bank Poverty Assessment, *private spending on education accounted for 1.4 percent of the total household monthly per capita expenditures* (World Bank, 2005, pg. 25).

Education and Political Participation

A determinant element which makes education vital to the existence of democracy is its driving force towards increased political participation. Well-educated citizens are more aware of the democratic values and norms, and are expected to be active through different forms of political participation. In other words, civic knowledge promotes

political participation. *All other things being equal, the more knowledge citizens have, the more likely they are to participate in public matters* (Galston, 2001, pg. 224).

Political participation includes different forms of organization among citizens. The whole variety of political participation forms, such as participation in interest groups, protests, demonstrations, non-governmental organizations, etc., is made possible through an active citizenship, which is educated with democratic values. A key role in this whole process is played by the higher education system in a country. This can be seen through the data retrieved via the World Values Survey, which shows that whilst globally nationality is fundamental in shaping values within countries, higher education can have a significant effect on changing values (Welzel and Inglehart, 2010).

As a consequence, a determinant role in this whole process is played by the middle class and the groups within the society in a country. All different groups of the society have their specific weight on the well-functioning of governance. Withdrawal for public engagement may cause unbalanced feedback for the political system, meaning that it has stopped to be responsive to different groups' needs. Thus, political engagement is not a sufficient condition for political effectiveness, but it is certainly necessary (Brannelly *et al*, 2011, pg.220)

A cyclic process can be evidenced among democracy, democratic values, civic participation and education. Each one of these elements is important in the well-functioning of the democratic framework within a country. And, if it works and results positive, it paves the way to long-term stability.

In the specific case of Albania, the BTI country report (2012) emphasizes that the country has shown considerable regress in most measures of political participation. In Albania, the legal code ensures freedom of assembly and association. What is more, the NGOs can also register freely and express their opinions and issues in public. *Indeed, protests have played a crucial role in Albania's fledgling democracy, and such activities have helped to catalyze large events in the country's history of democratic transition* (BTI Country Report, 2012, pg.7). A central role in providing financial assistance to the NGO's has been played by external funding, and which has also led to an increase of NGO's activity. Other sources of financing have been provided by the government, as in 2009 when the Albanian government included the society support in the state budget. However, there have been times, when protests and demonstrations has played a central role by putting at risk the stability of the institutions and the whole system, but in general there can be evidenced low levels of organizations and political participations from the society and its composing groups.

The Role of Education on the Political Stability of Albania

Political stability is one of the main governance indicators provided by different international agencies and institutions which shows important information on the well-functioning of a political system. Despite the various definitions on this concept, most of them converge on the idea of smooth progress of policies and lack of violence or structural change. In the same line, Hurwitz and other authors after him, correlate state stability with two elements: lack of violence and lack of structural change (1973). From the very simple concept, we can infer that this indicator

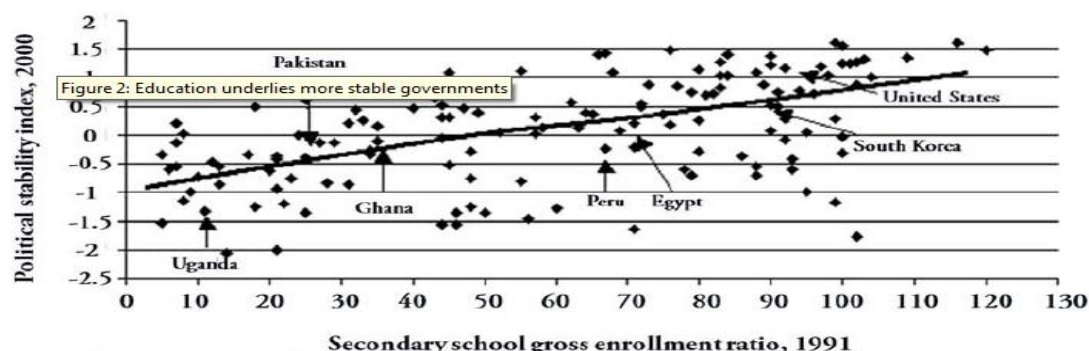
becomes very important especially in those countries which undergo system change from communism to democracy.

This is also the case of Albania for which political stability has become an integral part of the democratization process. In fact, while *it is theoretically possible for a state to remain stable without the citizens being properly educated, Hobbes provides reason to believe that it is extremely unlikely* (Anderson, 2003, pg. 96).

Since education, as a sector has been at the center of the reforms, our assumption is that it affects the stability of the political system as well. Early research has been focused on this relationship, evidencing education, among other socio-economic factors, as a prerequisite for democracy (Lipset, 1959). This conclusion is especially true for the Eastern Europe countries, which became the main stage of regime change at the beginning of the 90's (Valeverde, 1999). According to USAID, *education supports the growth of civil society, democracy, and political stability, allowing people to learn about their rights and acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to exercise them* (USAID, 2011).

Education is expected to play a more important stabilizing role in post-conflict situations or new democratic political systems. On the other hand, the government itself should pay attention to the overall education strategies and policies. *Governments that demonstrate sound, equitable management of education services are more stable and credible to their citizens.* Fq 1 (USAID, EQUIP, 2). The figure below provided by the World Bank shows a positive relationship between education and political stability. In most of the countries assessed by this institution higher levels of political stability go parallel with secondary school gross enrollment ratio. This is also true for higher education.

Figure 2. Education and political stability



Source: World Bank 2007. World Development Indicators: Kaufmann, D., A. Kraav, & M. Mastruzzi. 2003

Education is important to democracy because it promotes the support for democratic values. Primarily, it imbues

citizens, with civic knowledge which provides the background of the attitudes and beliefs towards the political system. This means that, *the more knowledge citizens*

have of political principles and institutions, the more likely they are to support core democratic principles, starting with tolerance (Galston, 2000, pg. 224). This is also supported by the study undertaken by Nie *et al.* who find a direct relationship from education to both knowledge of democratic principles and tolerance (1996, 71–72).

Besides the high contribution of education on the economic system and the fostering of democratic values, it is also associated with the creation of elites and the middle class which are fundamental to the stable ongoing of the democratization process. It helps provide individuals with the resources and values to effectively lobby elites, helping

to stabilize and embed democratic processes (Welzel and Inglehart, 2008). The middle class and the creation of elites provide the basis for a smooth and stable development of the political system and the society as a whole.

As a matter of fact, the political stability index of the World Bank Governance Indicators for Albania shows a decreasing tendency in the last years compared to earlier years of the post-communist period, especially for 2008 and 2009. This decreasing tendency is parallel to another phenomenon, the decrease in GDP contributions to education, despite the growing enrollment rates.

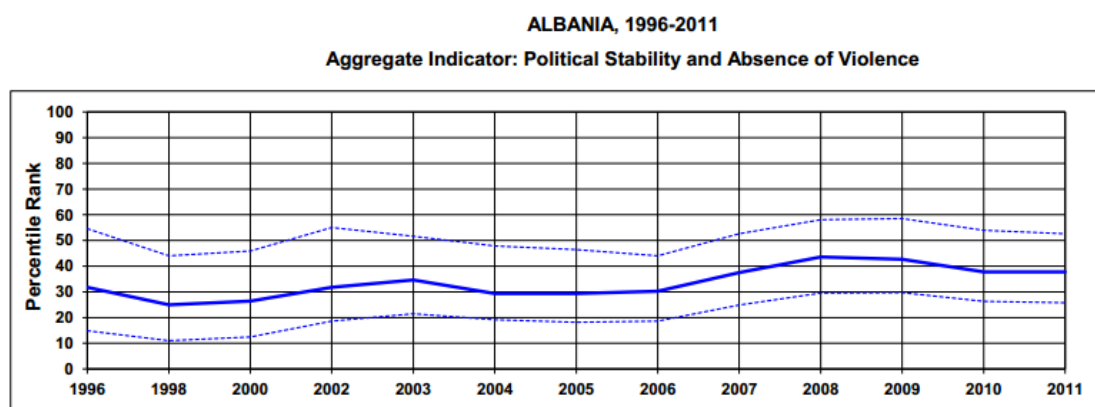


Figure 3. Worldwide Governance Indicators for Albania, World Bank Institute, 2012

Finally, we can argue that low growth rates these last years, have led to lower contributions to education from the GDP, reflecting a difficulty in the ability of the education system to perform qualitatively and respond to market needs. This becomes problematic during the last decade which has been characterized by growing levels of student enrollment in universities.

Conclusions

The education-political stability relationship in the framework of the democratization process in Albania, presents a new perspective in looking at the general sustainability of the political system in this country. The level of education seems to be positively related to levels of political stability over time. A well-educated youth is more able to formulate its expectations and needs, and far more rational to assess the progress of democratisation with all the political elements that the latter embraces.

The increase in the supply of higher education in Albania has led to an increase in the number of university graduates, which on the other hand has produced different

forms of political participation, having a direct impact on the stability of the political system. The whole democratization process of the country has been accompanied by a growth in numbers of students attending university studies.

However, the success of higher education in the creation of elites, middle class, in the increase of the civic knowledge in general and its real impact on the economy of the country is influenced by the GDP contribution to education, one of the lowest percentages in the region. The main economic indicator, the economic growth has had a growing trend throughout the years but in the recent years it has been considerably low which is accompanied by a decrease in GDP contribution to education from 2009 and on.

Finally, democracy, civic participation, and civil liberties do establish the bases for long-term stability. Even though Albania is in the process of the consolidation of democracy, more attention paid to education will help the country benefit in the long-term stability. Attention should be seen as equitable access to education, investments in the quality of education, by therefore increasing civic participation and more effective and good governance.

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