

# To What Extend the Democratic Party of Albania is Conservative?

## A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis of This Political Party

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Received: February 8, 2016

Accepted: April 11, 2016

Published: April 15, 2016

doi: 10.5296/jsss.v3i2.8997

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/jsss.v3i2.8997>

### Abstract

This paper will shed light upon the profile of the Democratic Party of Albania aiming to examine whether the party's self-claimed ideology of conservatism is in coherence and cohesion with its political evolution, policies and activities during democratic transition since early 1990s. Moreover, the party's doctrine will be inspected through the leader's sole philosophy as the first shaper and founding –father of the party. The empirical comparison with the other sister-like European political parties will be expounded by the theoretical interpretations on conservative values and conservative ideology. I argue that the profile of the Democratic Party of Albania draws mainly from the core values of classical conservatism; however, it also demonstrates particular features shaped by its leadership authoritarian authenticity and the domestic political - economic legacy of Albania.

**Keywords:** Democratic party, Albania, Conservative values, Evaluation

### 1. Introduction

Research on political transformations of Albania, in particular after the demise of communist dictatorship, has attracted interest to scholars and political scientists. The small rocky country of Southeastern Europe much-left to oblivion has finally grasped much of the researchers' attention due to its first experimentation with democracy- an alien notion of the governing regime to both the political elite and civil society activists. The newly established multi-party

political system has turned even more appealing to researchers especially concerning the political clashes between opposing political parties, their political behavior on the verge of parliamentary elections, their political agendas and international affiliation with regional and international partners, and the economic-political strategies in the vein of country's membership into European Union.

International institutions have given prominence to economic reforming, banking sector consolidation, human rights issues, gender equality, and many other controversial and argumentative subjects of social spectra. However, there has been placed little emphasis on the political ideology and theoretical approach of political parties which are the ones to design and carry out the domestic political, economic, cultural reforming of the country as well as to bear the burden of responsibility for the European Integration. Lastly, by analyzing the political profile of political parties and by filling the theoretical vacuum one can better perceive the activity, the policies and contribution to political transformation in Albania.

Therefore, the research question placed in this paper is straightforward- to what extent the Democratic Party of Albania is Conservative? I believe that the Democratic Party of Albania is officially based on the classical core values of conservative parties like tradition preservation, high-esteem for authority, sanctions applied by law, family and moral values and liberal economic version opening the market to business initiatives. However, this party also exhibits original nuances of inner authoritarianism leading to deprivation of freedoms and, even worse to accumulation of power in an authoritarian -like hand. Hence, this article will make a contribution to the studies on political parties aiming to observe and evaluate the conservative principles of the Democratic party of Albania since it has proclaimed its ideological affiliation with European Conservative parties. There is no theoretical analysis on the values and principles embedded with this political party. The originality of this article comes with the contribution put to body of literature on political party's ideology, theoretical principles and core values of the party in comparison to other sister-like parties in the international arena. Moreover, the importance of the article lies in the fact that only by analyzing the political pattern of the party, further research on the empirical level and policy applications can be conducted efficiently.

The research methodology will be the qualitative one aiming to investigate into the attitudes of the democratic party of Albania; behavior of its leader and the political experiences of this party during its governing mandates. The research tools utilized for this qualitative research will be that of textual analysis of theoretical literature and empirical details extracted from practical actions, speeches, interviews and reports. First, I will draw on the theoretical literature of political philosophy with close focus to conservatism key elements and definition, theoretical and ideological perceptions of conservative parties as well. This theoretical input will bring in the originality of the paper; otherwise it would fall merely on boring empirical data and facts on the Democratic Party's achievements or failures during the democratization process in more than two decades of political transition under predominantly the same leadership in Albania. Then, I will discuss the establishment of the Democratic Party, tracing its political context, the role of its initial leadership in shaping the character/nature of the party. Moreover, the party's ideological line and policies will be reflected through the political maneuvers of its most prominent leader namely Sali Berisha.

Thirdly, the paper will briefly discuss the features and the ideological track of the European political parties the DP is already a member. This brief description will provide more grounds on the commonalities or deviations between the Albanian democrats and their European counterparts, thus assisting more to provide an answer to our puzzle on the profile of this party. Finally, the conclusion will evaluate the degree to which the Democratic Party of Albania possesses a conservative profile by providing analytical clashes between practical actions and theoretical back up obtained through standard theories.

## **2. Drawing on Theories about Conservatism and Conservative Parties**

Driven by its name – conservatism- implies the preservation and conservation of something obtained before. However, depending on individual interpretations, to some this connotation would go so far as to deny the approval of change and thereby associating conservatism with preservation of tradition. Certainly, a most convincing proof of such inclination is explicitly given by Edmund Burke’s famous quotation:

*“Our business is interrupted, our repose is troubled, our pleasures are saddened, our very studies are poisoned and perverted, and knowledge is rendered worse than ignorance, by the enormous evils of this dreadful innovation...”* (Honderich, 2005)

This very distinctive feature of conservatism – preservation of tradition- is closely correlated with the perception of change and reform to society along with change and reform into a given political system. Conservatives perceive reform as extrinsic, it does not tackle the gist of the substance; the change distorts or touches directly the essence and the substance itself. This narrow but very significant division between change and necessity for reform originates from Burke’ contribution in his writing *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Honderich, 2005). In addition, Michael Oakshott elaborates the preserving nature of conservatism by arguing that if conservatism honors the present it is mostly because of its familiarity rather than pure admiration of the past and antiquity (Honderich, 2005). To his belief, change moves someone from the good to the bad, thus it is mostly embraced by the illiterate and ignorant.

In line with the above perception, Heywood synthesizes that tradition comprises accumulated knowledge and human wisdom over generations, institutions and established practices. Moreover, tradition represents a social and historical identity (Heywood, 2008).

Hoffman and Graham do not point a finger on tradition as among the key elements but they claim that for conservatives experience matters; they can approve of changes and advocate progress but they are not keen on radical experiments whose benign outcomes for a better changed world cannot be accurately anticipated (Hoffman, 2009, 2nd edition ).

Krohn makes another valuable contribution to theoretical definition of conservatism by treating it from a legal perspective. His main argument stands on the core of the conservative legal philosophy- the Constitution and the rights of individuals protected by it. The most inherent human right is *the freedom* as human beings are naturally born free and hence, they must remain as such free (Krohn, 2010). Attempting to define conservatism, Krohn distinguishes *strict constitutionism* upon which conservatives seek the literal interpretation of natural rights: the rights to life, liberty and property. In brief, he concludes that *strict constitutionism* is one sector of the conservative ideology complying with the main classical

pillars of conservatism: rule of law, morality, logic and history (Krohn, 2010). It is interesting to note that precisely from his interpretation is implied that constitution is crucial and the only savior of a society even from its government; should the latter use its vast power to the detriments of the natural rights.

Another most appealing literature aiming to redefine and reinforce conservatism is given by John Kekes in his book- *A case for Conservatism 2001*. He argues that conservatism is a political morality since its foci are the political arrangements that make a society good; it is morality because it holds that the goodness of a society depends on the goodness of the lives of its people (Kekes, 2001). He also highlights the conservatives' resistance to change in preference to a reasonable and reflective defense of traditional arrangements. In addition, his stance is rather unique compared to other research on conservatism because it does not consist of thoughts from renowned conservative thinkers; on the contrary, he aims at making the case that conservatism remains still the best approach to having a good society. In sum, from a political spectrum he wants to accentuate that conservatism is the only political approach most conducive to achieving and protecting a good life (Kekes, 2001).

To continue further, Sean Hanley in his book entitled *The new Right in the New Europe: Czech Transformation and Right-wing Politics 1989- 2006*, brings up a new viewpoint of conservative values to be preserved in a vacuum of ideology shifting from one political regime to another. Hanley takes the case of the democratic political changes happening in Czech Republic likewise other ex-socialist countries, the demise of the previous communist ideology required not only new institutional infrastructure but also as he puts 'the construction of new understandings of politics and of new political identities to provide a meaningful framework for political action' (Hanley, 2008). He draws mostly on Vaclav Klaus discourses on what conservatism means as the attempt to preserve the genuine verified values of our civilization so far rather than holding anything old for its own sake (Hanley, 2008). This study sheds light on the need of cohesion between universally acclaimed conservative values and the national genuine ones in the path of political regime change.

Garnett and Hickson deal with the political thought underlying Conservative party. They also tackle the issue of this party having no ideology. In particular, this argument is maintained judging that this party represents a pragmatic movement committed and limited to winning elections and thus building up an effective opposition or while in power demonstrating government competence (Granett & Hickson, 2009). Moreover, they continue that given the fact that the Conservative Parties are not driven by ideology, they are mainly limited to statecraft up to the circumstances and vision of the Party's leaders.

Switching back to political ideology literature, another striking component of conservatism is the respect for institutions; the respect is conveyed by the socio-historical context of their first creation (Hoffman, 2009, 2nd edition). Moreover, to this argument stable states reflect a successful institutional building. Consequently, to conservatives' belief many newly declared states as well as states undergoing political transformation suffer mostly from the lack of evolution of strong institutions. Moreover, authority is an essential element linked to core conservative thought. Authority is exercised by above, from a leader who has experience, knowledge and even a sense of natural aristocracy (Heywood, 2008, 4th edition).

(Mark, 1996, 6th edition) summarize the basic principles of conservative movement to be:

- Individual liberties even more important than equality.
- Allergy of concentrating power in the hands of people.
- Insistence on an organic society - emphasizing that community interests stand above the individual
- Respect for tradition and inheritance by their ancestors.
- Religious and moral values are very precious to conservatives.
- Tradition gains prominence even versus reasoning.
- Nearly all conservative ideologies are elitists.

They also distinguish the peculiarities for British Conservatives as compared to American ones, though some might apparently believe that they fall in the same line. The British ones despite being committed to democratic principles give importance to the authority and figure of the leadership as having the natural skills to rule upon the others which in turn have to listen to. They argue that because of the organic nature of the state- implying that parts of this organic body (society) have to be assembled through hierarchy; the latter gives trust to the authority of natural leaders.

American Conservative parties unlike the British ones do not hold any tradition from historical and geopolitical circumstances ever since the settlements of the first colonies. The first colonies were motivated by the necessity to challenge the status quo and to make changes rather than preserve cultural, political or ‘inheritance’ legacies. Consequently, the fundamental principles of American *conservatism* are based on the assumption that ‘men are created equal and they have to obey only to the law rather than to a single authority of one leader. I quote directly ([http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html)) the preamble of the USA constitution which states that law will be the only one to ensure democratic freedoms over any previous tradition:

*“We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the General Welfare and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”*

As seen in here, Americans placed emphasis on individual rights and human reasoning rather than irrational preservation of any further obsolete tradition. In addition, this political conservative ideology in the USA has been associated with economic liberalism theory. American economy highlights the competitive capitalism, private entrepreneurship, the pursuit of self-interest profits which falls in divergence with the British or even the European one (Mark. 1996).

Milada Vachudova elaborates on democratically elected rulers and their respect for the political liberties of their citizens (Vachudova, 2005). Moreover, she argues that these rulers uphold the rule of law, the separation of powers and boundaries between the state and economy. Another point she tackles is the relationship between the qualities of political competition at the moment of regime change. This competition places a determining role on whether that country will shift to a liberal or illiberal pattern of political change (Vachudova, 2005). After 1989, unfortunately Albania did not offer any legacy at all of previous political parties’ competition, any opposition to economic governmental policies. In the vein of this discussion, Vachudova

further argues that when there is a vacuum of political competition, ruling elites are free to cultivate an illiberal democracy and pursue these rent-seeking strategies even to the extent of sacrificing economic welfare and sustainable democratic achievements (Vachudova, 2005).

### **3. The Democratic Party of Albania: From Establishment to Political Evolution**

In line with this theoretical analysis I locate the case of the Democratic Party of Albania as self-claimed - conservative one. The DP was the first party to be established as a result of the December 1990 Students' movement in an attempt to demise the communist regime of Albania. The first co-founders of the party were Sali Berisha, a professor of cardiology and ex-Secretary of Communist Party; Azem Hajdari law student of that time, Arben Imami, Gramoz Pasho, Professor of Economy at Tirana State University, Avdyl Matoshi, Eduard Selami, Aleksander Meksi among others. It was the first opposition party which overwhelmingly won parliamentary elections in 1992. Sali Berisha was the newly elected President and the engineer Aleksander Meksi was the prime minister to create the cabinet. Not by accident most of these newly democratic elite carried a communist legacy; Berisha himself had been noticed as a hard-line communist party member attached to his inherent authoritarian personality features (Pettifer, 2002).

Needless to say, straightforward Berisha manifested symptoms of authoritarianism in his presidential ruling; he imprisoned for 6 months the leader of an opposition party under charges of having denounced the then-president Berisha in a daily newspaper (Bideleux, 2007). In November 1994, soon after the first foot setting of ex-king Zog's son, he empowered the office of President; the President received the right to nominate the prime minister, to appoint and dismiss ministers upon the premier's proposal. In addition, Berisha invested itself with legitimate power to dismiss cabinet members, to arrest or dismiss Supreme Court members and constitutional members with approval of Parliament (Bideleux, 2007).

Once taking power on 18 April 1992, the Democrats' government revealed its economic program of privatization and 'marketization' ((Bideleux, 2007). With concerns to economic reform, they undertook severe measures to reduce the huge budget deficit; to liberalize the foreign trade by signing agreements with EU and EFTA in 1992; swift price liberalization, and most significantly pushing hard the rapid privatization of public enterprises, though for huge ones this turned a lengthy process (Bideleux, 2007). Furthermore, sharing similarities with Thatcher's strong commitment to privatization, in early 1995 Berisha approved of mass-privatization of program which resulted in June 1996 with 400 medium and large enterprises being privatized through auctions and by July 1996-1997 public enterprises had been already sold.

However, despite the euphoric motivation to accelerate substantially the rhythm of the democratization process and economic growth, the Democrats lacked any previous political experience of good ruling models. Biberaj in his extremely well-grounded book on *Albania's road towards democracy* argues that such political and economic achievements seemed unfeasible for the inexperienced government of Berisha (Biberaj, 1998). In particular, the huge deficit of any previous market economy practice was convincingly demonstrated by the total economic bankruptcy and the state collapse associated with the demise of pyramid scheme in 1997. Before such period, Albania was considered the Balkan tiger with its

impressive speedy transformation which unfortunately proved to have been superficial and just a cheating of the Democratic Party ‘daunting agenda’ (Ibid).

Furthermore, James Pettifer in his article on democratization of Albania sheds light upon the economic disparity between social and political classes in this country and, in addition, he talks about the creation of a kleptocratic elite which ignored the rapid growth of the pyramid schemes (Pettifer, 2002). This false economic progress of Albania emitted its first symptoms of undergoing crisis in early October 1996 while pyramid schemes had captured almost the entire financial system. As the pyramid foundations could not repay all depositors’ money, massive uprisings erupted all over the country leading Berisha’s government towards resignation. The frustrated crowds which lost their savings into the pyramid schemes ended up with almost a civil war, state collapse, military being attacked and population armed with weapons, thus further augmenting organized crime and life insecurity in the country.

Despite this huge disgrace and scandal, though much typical for emerging democracies, the Democratic Party of Berisha still came in power due to its victory of July 2005 parliamentary elections gaining 56 of the 140 seats adding up 18 seats by its allies in coalition ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic\\_Party\\_of\\_Albania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Party_of_Albania)). Berisha was appointed prime minister again, energetically promising further Euro-Atlantic integration of his country and economic reforming. An explicit demonstration of his liberal –minded approach of an open economy was accentuated in his interview for Steven Horbes during the UN summit in November 2010. Here, he openly unfolded the economic role model he had pursued ever since the beginnings of his political career.

His model had been Ronald Regan- the much known- low tax president of the USA (<http://www.forbes.com/2010/10/08/flat-tax-albania-intelligent-investing-berisha.html>). In the following I bring in this interview transcript to get to the argument of this paper on distinguishing conservative traits in the Democratic Party leader:

*“But also I was very much influenced by Ronald Reagan. He was an ideal to me as a leader who fought so successfully against companies. And that’s why I have a deep belief for him. He was a low-tax president. And he wrote that low taxes, money, more or less, money in the accounts of the investors, of private people, are much more efficient than in public cases. And that was absolutely true for Albania, because the capacity of the public sector was almost inexistent. That’s why I started the career as a low-tax man. I put, at that time, the lowest fiscal burden country on Europe...”*

Truly, the Democrats’ two-governing mandates from 2005-2013 have been acknowledged even by the international institutions’ reports for “its relaxing policy on favoring business growth and providing huge space for its flourishing” (European Bank Document, December 2012). As the European Bank reports of year 2012 pointed out, Albania had surpassed economic crisis due to its serious attempts to strengthen institutional reform. Moreover, this credible European institution praises Albania for its maximum score (4+) for price liberalization, trade and foreign exchange system; these indicators serve as a pure manifestation of the Democratic Party approach to free market liberalization and very open economy. Moreover, as the European Bank report states Albania’s business environment has been generally perceived to have improved steadily over the years with a strong and evident entrepreneurial spirit.

The Democratic Party's endorsement of open economy and society was also revealed by its educational strategy for higher education by providing fast licensing to a great number of private universities ; in line with Berisha's assumption of liberalized universities as an equal opportunity to anyone who wanted to attend academic studies. John Rawls in his *Collected Papers* (year 1999) makes the distinction between property-owning democracy and the welfare-state capitalism. The first one, he argues 'works to disperse the ownership of wealth and capital, and thus to prevent a small part of society from gaining control over economy and politics as well. On the opposite, the welfare-state capitalism permits a small class to have a near monopoly of the means of productions (Rawls, 1999). With regard to monopoly risk, he continues that property –owning democracy avoids such a risk not by fair redistribution of the incomes but by guaranteeing the widespread ownership of productive assets and human capital (Rawls, 1999). In his belief, educational and training opportunities should be offered equally to everyone in order to guarantee that every citizen stands on an equal social and economic footing in society. Berisha's approach towards the right of higher education was much in line with Rawls two principles of justice with the framework of democratic conception, as follows:

- 1) Equal liberty: each person is guaranteed a set of basic liberties.
- 2) Equal opportunity: there must be equal access to jobs and services under fair equality of opportunity. (Rawls, 2001, pp. 42-43)

During Berisha's eight years of prime ruling from 2005- 2013, in Albania were totally 59 higher education institutions out of which 15 were public and 44 private ( Final Report for Reform of Higher Education and Research, 2014).

#### **4. The Democratic Party of Albania and its Affiliation with European Parties**

Although not deeply elaborated in the political program and doctrine of the party, the Democratic Party of Albania has self-claimed itself as being a conservative political party whose ideology encompasses: Conservatism, Liberal conservatism, and Pro-Europeanization. Here, I consider meaningful to provide some theoretical input on the definitions of three concepts: theory, philosophy and ideology. Unfortunately, due to a grave deficit of any theoretical distinction between such concepts at any political party program or historical traces, this lack of understanding and even acknowledging of differences could be the explanatory variable of unique challenges and hardships Albanian democratic transition has been undergoing, even compared to its Balkan neighboring.

To continue, the Democratic Party of Albania enjoys the observer member-status of the European People's Party (EPP) and in the meantime, it is a full member of the International Democrat Union and of the Centrist Democrat International. In full compliance with the cohesion of my paper's scope on determining the conservatism of our case study- the Democratic Party of Albania, I will provide a short description of these affiliated parties aiming to search for similarities in their theoretical and political agenda. To begin with, the European People's Party (EPP) is a European party established by the Christian Democratic parties in 1976, by now encompassing conservative parties and other parties with a centre-right approach. The EPP has been the largest party in the European Parliament since 1999 and in the European Council since 2002. It is also by far the largest party in the current



in the European Commission. The driving engine of this party keeps being the strong pro-European Integration target.

Consequently, it has endorsed the enlargement integration processes ever since the communist collapse in the post-Soviet camp. In order to catch up with the democratic developments of the international arena in the 1992 Athens Summit, the party reinforced in its program the basic principles as stated later on in their 2001 Berlin declaration “A Union of Values”. Moreover, in the Congress of Bucharest in 2012, the EPP updated its political platform after 20 years by synthesizing its traditional core values and policies as follows:

- Freedom as a central human right, coupled with responsibility
- Respect for traditions and associations
- Ensuring solid public finances
- Preserving a healthy environment
- Subsidiary
- Pluralist democracy and a Social Market Economy

With regard to European Union the party’s main agenda among other issues, comprises:

- European Political Union
- Completion of the European Single Market
- Promotion of the family, improvements in education and health
- Strengthening of the common immigration and asylum policy, and integrating immigrants
- Continuation of enlargement of the EU

Due to space limitations of the paper, I could briefly depict the similar policies and priorities of Democratic Party of Albania with the core ones of the EPP. Berisha’s governments have always kept as a top-priority country’s accession into European Union. The rhetoric of a rapid membership and adherence of the small country into EU has been so euphoric that no one has ever given second thoughts of doubting the positive versus the drawbacks of this process for fragile and feeble Albania. Indisputably, this priority falls into perfect matching with the ideology of this European centre-right party. Freedom as a central human right has been the milestone not only of the first establishment of the Democratic Party but also its main cause of glamorous electoral victory in a country notoriously known for half a century total deprivation of any human right and freedom of individual. Family and preservation of moral, traditional values has been the most striking feature of the leader of Democratic Party- Sali Berisha; likewise the promises of EPP in December 2009 for European Parliament highlighting the role of family as the core of a democratic society.

As far as the other European affiliation is concerned, the Democratic Party of Albania is a full member of the Democrat Union and of the Centrist Democrat International. Stemming from the Christian Democratic parties founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they reemerged even more vividly after the second World War in Germany, France, Belgium, Austria, Holland and Italy to be stretched in the 1970s in Portugal, Spain and Latin America (Mark.1996). These parties synthesized successfully social reforming embedded in Social Catholicism with democracy consolidation represented in *liberal and democratic Catholicism* (Ibid). Moreover, despite

their apparently religious doctrine to strengthen clerical values to church, rigid conservatism on issues related to morality, family, divorce, abortion, education importance; these parties are also allied with liberal market economy much in common with liberal parties (Mark, 1996, 6th edition).

To finalize this section related to DP affiliation with the British, American and European conservative parties, Albanian democrats have pretended to have pursued a British –Thatcher style of self-help and meritocracy system; this never truly worked because the Democrats ruling has always been blamed and even punished by the EU and other international organizations mostly for corruption, governmental abuse with public administration job vacancies not respecting a meritocratic procedure. The Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) cites that 'the core problem in Albania is not the lack of democratic institutions and procedures, but the misuse of laws and institutions by the ruling elite for political or individual gain. This shift or elites' focus on political or individual goals at the expense of institutional procedures, has additionally worked to stagnate or even reverse some important steps taken in management performance and economic development (BTI, Albania Country Report, 2014).

## 5. Concluding Remarks

Although conservatives do not approve of being glued to a fixed system of ideas, be it American or British/European style, conservatism consists of the following core values: a) human nature is morally imperfect as such only law and imprisonment can serve as deterrent factors; b) hierarchy and leadership authority are very crucial and even indisputable; c) importance of education; d) inequality has to be accepted - at the end, the meritocratic system pushes the weaker to become stronger; d) respect for tradition, family and accumulated wisdom/experience (Burke, 1790).

Our case study, Albania's first democratically elected government of the Democratic Party fleeing from the communist ruins declared itself Conservative in preserving the basic human rights. Despite claiming to preserve tradition and inherited values, the DP had no tradition of any democratic norm or democratic statecraft ever before applied by any political arrangement in the country's history. On the contrary, since there was a huge vacuum of democratic culture norm in statecraft which is why Berisha's early ruling falls much in line with *pulling down every communist legacy and starting from the scratch* a new era in Albanian history. In early 1990s most public owned factories and enterprises were closed, most factories and warehouse were stolen and totally ruined. Unfortunately, the 1997 state collapse manifested the same logic of change through violence, through attacking of military deposits and other public institutional even libraries robbery, museums mugging and other economic entities being smuggled as a continuation of a root-destroy rational and starting again a new development cycle from zero level.

With regard to family and morality, the leader of the DP was remarkably praised in any electoral campaign for his profile of much loved father and loyal husband always advocating a good society built upon strong family ties. However, his several executive cabinet members do not represent men of consolidated family profile; the notorious case of minister of culture in March 2009 caught in a sexual scandal in favor of job offer at his ministry has been one of the most infamous proofs (Top Channel.05/03/2009). Kekes elaborates conservative

reflection as the one aiming to resolve conflicts about political arrangement in order to protect the political conditions of good lives (Kekes, 2001). Much in line with Kekes' claim that conservatism is the best political approach to guarantee and protect good society, the Democratic Party of Albania truly has been guided by this ultimate leitmotiv; to better the lives of its citizens and of society in general by pushing further the natural rights of freedom and liberty ever since the party's inception. Moreover, with regard to conflict resolution in regard with regional security, the DP initiative and shaped a foreign strategy of cooperation, mutual understanding and peaceful relations with its 'troublesome' neighboring countries, in particular during Kosovo conflict in 1998 this pacifist approach became very much visible.

Respect for institutions and rule of law another core value of conservatives was never complied by the DP rulings. Law implementation as the sole guarantee of institutional independence from political influence continued being the black hole during the whole democratization decades. Due to malfunction and non-existence of an independent judiciary, the crime rate and transnational criminal network of human trafficking, drug dealing and money laundering became notable by critical observers. These all manifested themselves with the pyramid scheme collapse in 1997; unfortunately this state collapse implied a permanent gateway to criminality, political turmoil, economic instability- all of these not advocated by the conservative parties in continental Europe, USA or Britain. These conservative ones on the contrary, obey strictly to the rule of law and legitimate authority emitted by independent state institutions.

Appraisal of Education, the importance of knowledge to the future prosperity of the country and massive liberalization of private and public universities has been a most striking feature of the DP political agenda. As revealed previously in the study, numerous private higher educational institutions popped up like mushrooms all over Albania. Unfortunately, this conservative approach of not depriving any citizen of its natural right to be illuminated did not guarantee the right of equal high quality education being offered rigorously by all these universities. Most of them turned to be driven by the commercial principles prevailing quality service to the future generations of the country. Again a huge discrepancy between the positive conservative will of DP but not performed to the European or international educational standards where the DP adhered to integrate its country.

Equality and free market initiative have been mostly boosted by the Democrat economic program of market liberalization as proved in the previous sections of this study. This was tangibly supported by facilitating bureaucratic procedures to set up a new business, by applying the flat tax which to Democrats meant walking in the footsteps of Regan's liberal capitalism and Thatcherism self-help style of economy. Nevertheless, this economic camouflage was not to the interest of every citizen; it favored only the rich not the massive poor. Moreover, through accumulation of wealth into few hands of powerful businessmen and/or politicians, pervasive corruption and financial abuse became normative values of the Democrats affairs as harshly pointed out by European Union reports and other international actors. In addition, it was precisely in the beginning of political transformations that the Democratic Party firstly set up a corrupt judicial system by making political appointments rather than professional ones based on meritocracy. Furthermore, the meritocracy system of competitive values never existed for the public administration officials who gained their

positions through party membership loyalty and contribution rather than professional competence (Note 1). Albanian democratization would have been the most prosperous and sustainable one among other Southeastern Europeans. In addition, studies on political and economic transitions credit a huge space to the role of leadership which does not manifest itself in the manner of *dues ex machine*, coming out of an external socio-political context where it operates (Pridham, 2002).

Furthermore, another important element of conservatives is the appreciation of authority. Authority in political leadership is affiliated with the respect for the leader who embodies natural aristocratic values, knowledge, wisdom, political experience and training (Heywood, p 35). In the case of the DP leader, it has proved to follow blindly this conservative principle of highly evaluating and even non-replacing the authority of the sole leadership; in him (Sali Berisha) they find the political wisdom and knowledge of two - decade political management of the country from communist regime to the democratic one.

In contrast though, within Democratic political party the figure of its leader has been seen as very authoritarian and even uncontestable, which made the Democrats even create fragmentations deviating from the mother-party like the Reformed Democratic party of Genc Pollo in early 2000; whereas Bamir Topi - former country president elected by the Democratic majority, and one of the most modern profile democrat in September 2012 created his new political party *The New Democratic Spirit* as another dissatisfied fragmentation from the DP much dominated by one hard-line authority of the leader Berisha.

Needless to say, the core conservatism characteristics of the Democratic Party notably remain in paper rather than in real practice. It could be explained as a perfect case where the role of firm-hand leadership by one person for almost 20 years has interpreted and adjusted the connotation of such conservative values to the best of the political party's short term interest and individual gains. To conclude, the political profile of the Democratic party of Albania is still a very ambiguous one. So far for nearly twenty years it could be described as a *new bottle holding old wine*: it will need long inner reforming to meet the true standards and values of the conservative parties in Europe or the USA and to create a democratic tradition within the party in order to have indeed certain core values and virtues to hold precious and further upgrade.

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Note 1. Note, as the paper is focused on a sole case study that of the Democratic Party, it has therefore limited the insights only to this political party. However, if we were to give a full picture of the two main political ruling parties, even the Socialist one suffers from the same symptoms of political influence over professional competence

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