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# Multicultural consolidation through Consociational Democracy

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**Abstract.** The consensus in multicultural societies such as North Macedonia may not be the same as in states with a homogeneous liberal culture. The "power-sharing" model that emerged from a war crisis and a peace Agreement acknowledges the division of society which is in the process of consolidation. The Elite consensual culture in the sense of Liphart's "spirit of adaptation and compromise" has been considered necessary for democratic consolidation, by not neglecting the power of voters to elect their political leaders. North Macedonia can have a thriving multicultural Democracy only if it builds an authentic consensual model of power-sharing that is generated under the social, cultural, ethnic, and religious structure of his society.

**Keywords:** Consociational Democracy; Power-sharing; Elite Political Culture; North Macedonia.

## 1 Introduction

One month after the conflict escalated, i.e., in April 2001, the leader of the Albanian Democratic Party, Arben Xhaferi, conveyed the demands of the Albanian citizens by formulating them into a so-called non-paper of the DPA. This document firstly calls for the constitutional change of the state, i.e., North Macedonia to be no more ethnocentric as foreseen by the 1991 constitution, and also for greater inclusiveness and inclusion in line with the standards and international conventions in order to reflect the multicultural reality of Macedonian society. These demands realized through a concrete and mediated dialogue of the European Union, NATO and the OSCE are conceived in three even larger entities: constitutional changes, equitable representation in state institutions and integration and the socialization of all those who clearly showed disloyalty to the state (Çupeska: 119). This document is a big step towards changing the political system of the Republic of North Macedonia. It was not accidental that the request was made just one month before the armed conflict began because Mr. Xhaferi, due to several years of political experience, had already detected the inter-ethnic crisis in the country due to the inappropriate political system.

## 2 Consociational Democracy in Republic of North Macedonia

The structure in the Republic of North North Macedonia is multiethnic. “Its first decade of independence was marked by the building of institutions within the political system based on the prototype of Western liberal Democracy” (Ambarkov, 2016). “Ethnic communities do not live in homogeneous centers, while the population in most of the territory, respectively in settlements, is mixed” (Bakiu, 2014). There are several factors that separate the two main ethnic groups in the Republic of North Macedonia: Macedonians and Albanians belong to different cultures and religions; They speak different languages and have minimal interethnic communication; There are very few mixed marriages; Geographically they live in separate areas, except in multiethnic cities, as is the case with the capital of Skopje and Tetovo; Macedonians and Albanians living in separate neighborhoods, different cafes and meeting places; They read various newspapers that mainly address their populations; They operate in different economic spheres; Often there are cases of discrimination and other human rights violations documented by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Helsinki Community and these cases are mostly reported by the Albanian side, as a consequence there is a growing sense of mistrust towards the state among citizens and this culminated with the 2001 war.

The Ohrid peace accord signed after the ethnic armed conflict in North Macedonia in 2001 has largely changed the constitutional framework of the country's previous political system, from the so-called Westminster democratic political framework established by the 1991 Constitution, which favored ethnic Macedonians, in creating a new model, known in political theory as power-sharing. This model contains solutions that can be used for both purposes: country integration but also dissolution, if misused. Success depends on the moderate attitude of the citizens, formerly on the politicians and their commitment to the values of Democracy, human rights, and freedoms instead of the "national question" (Maleska, 2005).

For Lijphart and many with him, Democracy in deeply divided societies is possible only when power is shared instead of monopolized, devolved rather than centralized. Majoritarian Democracy is judged unsuitable for plural societies, because the winner-takes-all character and concentration of power allow a dominant group or coalition of groups to capture state power, relegating the minority into permanent opposition (Bogaards, 2006: 119). Lijphart himself has emphasized this by saying: “I became strongly aware of the dangers of majoritarian Democracy for religiously and ethnically divided societies, but I still believed that it was the better choice for more homogeneous countries. Only from the mid- 1980s on did I become more and more convinced that the consociational and consensus models of Democracy were superior to the majoritarian model for all democracies and in almost all respects (Lijphart, *Consociationalism After Half a Century*, 2018). His research culminated in my 1977 book *Democracy in Plural Societies*, in which he defined consociational Democracy in terms of four basic principles: (a) power-sharing executives in which all crucial groups are represented; (b) cultural autonomy for these groups; (c) proportionality in political representation, civil service appointments, and government subsidies; and (d) a minority veto power with regard to the most vital issues such as minority rights and autonomy (Lijphart, 1977).

As we can see from the above, Lijphart has sometimes emphasized the term Consociational, sometimes Power-sharing and in other cases a consensus model. According to Bogaards, Lijphart has proposed the term “power-sharing Democracy” in place of the more established, but less intuitive, term “consociational Democracy”, whereas others use “power-sharing” as an umbrella concept that includes not only consociational Democracy but also the rival model of integrative majoritarianism (Horowitz, 2002). Although there are differences between the three terminologies, if all three are majority opposition, in this paper, we will only refer to the term Consociational Democracy or simply Consociationalism. “Consociationalism is defined as an accommodative arrangement for power-sharing that includes all significant groups in legislative and executive institutions, and one which promotes proportionality within public administration (McGarry & O’Leary, 2009a).

According to Robert Dahl, the consociational model of Democracy requires favorable conditions. First, “political Elites must believe that consociational arrangements are desirable and feasible, and they also must have knowledge and motives to implement them. There should be at least some political balance” (Dahl: 349). Lijphart (1969: 217–219) identifies three factors that are conducive to the successful implementation and operation of Consociationalism. Firstly, the existence of an external threat is necessary in order to encourage cooperation between Elites from different segments. Secondly, a multiple balance of power is needed, as this reduces the probability that a particular segment will aim to dominate, as is likely in societies with two segments of a similar size or in those where one segment has a majority. Finally, it is argued that it is essential that the decision-making apparatus is not overloaded, as burdens on this may hinder the successful maintenance of consociational.

“Primarily, this model was prescribed as a remedy for divided societies to practice Democracy. However, recently, this power-sharing model has been recommended to maintain peace and order in post-conflict societies such as Macedonia, Bosnia- Herzegovina, Northern Irelands, Afghanistan and Iraq” (O’Leary, 2005).

### **3 Ohrid Peace Agreement**

The Ohrid Agreement introduced new elements into the Constitution, moving North Macedonia towards consociational Democracy. Amendments IV-XV to the Constitution stipulates complex decision-making mechanisms and grant veto rights to the minority members in certain regions. The Ohrid Agreement de facto confirmed that the Albanians are a constituent nation, recognized their language in public and official occasions, higher education institutions in the Albanian language, new municipalities were formed with Albanian ethnic majority, relevant progress has been achieved in employing Albanians in public services. (Orlović, 2015: 35-36) With the help of Decentralization, the majority community becomes the minority at the local level, and that is a kind of test for understanding the importance of minority and majority in multicultural societies. For Orlovic, (2015: 38) "the Ohrid Framework Agreement is a compromise, on the one hand; it reflects the position on North Macedonians a unitary state. On the other hand, it increased the influence of Albanians in Parliament, Government, and public administration, especially at the local level.

## **4 Parliamentary and Governmental Representation**

In order to ascertain parliament's role in consociational arrangements, one needs to take into consideration how the diversity in the given society is represented, and the power the parliament and the different communities hold within the society. If we look at the neighboring states where consociational Democracy is also installed, we will notice that in their Parliament room seats are reserved for minorities, for examples: in Kosovo, ten seats are reserved for Serbs, and an additional ten are reserved for other minorities (four for the Roma, three for Bosniacs, two for Turks, and one for the Gorani). Reserved seats are also in use in neighboring Montenegro, exclusively for the Albanian community. However, this is not the case for North Macedonia. In North Macedonia, the advantage through the Ohrid Agreement is made in other forms: "one of the most important innovations in the Ohrid Agreement is the principle of double majority, the so-called Bandinter majority in the legislative process, where passing of laws important for minorities requires the majority of all MPs in the Parliament, together with the majority of votes of the minority representatives (Amendment X to the Constitution of North Macedonia 2001). Another innovation is the Committee for Relations between the Communities in the Macedonian Assembly, with 19 members, Macedonians and Albanians give each and Turks, Vlachs, Roma, Bosniaks and Serbs one each (Orlović, 2015).

No consociational Democracy would be complete without broad group representation at the government level. Lijphart considers it to be the most important element of Consociationalism. According to Lijphart (1992: 45-47), no power-sharing arrangement is complete if ethnic communities are not broadly represented at the level of the government. North Macedonia is not legally regulated for a grand coalition. Nevertheless, since the first freely elected government following the 1990 elections, parties representing the Albanian community have been included in the government. The participation of Albanians was a result of pressure from external diplomatic factors, as well as the result of mathematical coalitions to achieve a majority. Till 2008, "winner of the elections in Macedonian political bloc decides whether to form a coalition with Albanian parties and with whom. This legally unregulated issue of consensual functioning allows the Macedonian winner to elect a coalition partner to the party that has not won the elections in the Albanian political bloc. Thus the will of the Albanian community and the principle of the coalition of winners in different communities are not respected". (Bakiu, 2014)

## **5 Elite political culture**

As we have noted above, the key features of the consociational model are successfully implemented and function only in meeting certain conditions. However, in addition to the above, the key to the success of the model is the existence of Elite political culture, more specifically a compromise-based culture and an Agreement between Elites. The political consensus of the Elites is essential for the consolidation of political systems, especially in societies deeply divided along ethnic, religious, or linguistic lines in stable democracies. As Çupeska (127) said: "the least painful method of

achieving inclusiveness is through soft arbitration with the help of which the political Elites must approach and agree," which sometimes may be detrimental to their community.

The political culture of the Elites contains more principles and propositions: A policy that excludes the principle of competition, focusing on managing differences between different segments; Accepting differences as a reality and with the necessary measure of tolerance, rather than insisting on changing them, even if these differences are not respectfully acknowledged; Making the most important decisions by consensus among the leaders of the individual segments at the highest diplomatic level; Proportionality in the allocation of resources and decisions; Depoliticization in terms of the apostrophe of constitutional and legal mechanisms in the realization of proportionality; The secrecy of the negotiations between the Elites and the government's right to rule and function without restriction.

In the following, we will focus on two case studies to understand how the political Elite made decisions in North Macedonia:

(1) The biggest crisis of the North Macedonian consociative model came after the 2006 elections, whereby the winner of the elections in the Macedonian ethnic block (VMRO-DPMNE) did not form a coalition with the winner of the Albanian ethnic block in the elections (DUI). The DUI considered this a violation of the Ohrid Agreement and the principles set out by the international community, even though this framework Agreement did not formalize how the composition of the government would be determined. Being that this created critical interethnic tensions, the international community once again "brokered" a deal between the leaders of VMRO-DPMNE and DUI, which was colloquially known as the May Agreement (May 29, 2007), however never in a formal document. This agreement led to a coalition between the two parties after the elections in 2008, and the international community once again succeeded in calming political unrest through leaders' meetings, which was just a temporary occurrence, unfortunately. (Markovikj & Nechev, 2018: 3-4) "The so-called "May Agreement" was never published in the official media. That brought to the enlargement of the issues to which the minority-veto applies: the revision of the legislation concerning the use of language and the establishment of the practice according to which the government is formed by the winning parties of the Macedonian and Albanian block, regardless of their ideological preferences and distance. While the content of the Agreement has been kept secret to date, all speculations of the media on the practical solutions proposed in the Agreement revealed to be accurate: such policies like new elections, the creation of the coalition VMRO-DUI, the enlargement of the minority's veto powers, the revision of the use of language, the Albanian's acceptance to delay the division of the municipality of Kicevo believed to be a part of Agreement, were all put into practice (Nasevski: 11). Even though DUI Vice President Teuta Arifi confirms the signing of this Agreement said that: "We think the May Agreement is the correct Agreement we have been behind, we have installed it," and party spokesman Bujar Osmani said that: I think what dominates the stage is respect for the Agreements signed. North Macedonia has in the past existed as such only by respecting international Agreements. One of them is the May 2008 Agreement, which states that the winner in the Albanian community selects the winner partner in the Macedonian community". However, this was also confirmed by Ambassador Gillian Milovanovic who said in an interview with Dnevnik in 2007 that

the Agreement had three points that were agreed to be implemented and two points that needed further discussion. Forming a government was just a discussion. (novatv.mk, 2017). On the other side "in response to a parliamentary question asked by the ex SDSM president, Radmila Sekerinska, at the 2007 Parliament session, Gruevski said of the May Agreement, "It is not an Agreement, it is just a proceedings" (novatv.mk/youtube, 2017).

(2) Despite the Inter-partnership crises between VMRO and DUI (2006) and the May Agreement (2007), even though the DUI insisted that all future governments should be formed between the winning parties of the two parliamentary blocs, (Ambarkov, 2016) this Agreement was precisely broken by DUI in 2018 when it elected SDSM as the second partner in the Macedonian bloc as a government partner. DUI spokesman Bujar Osmani, in an interview for Voice of America in Albanian, says North Macedonia is being pressured to disregard the principle that the winner of the Albanian community chooses the winner partner of the Macedonian community, by saying: "I think what dominates the stage is respect for the Agreements signed. North Macedonia has in the past existed as such only by respecting international Agreements. One of them is the May 2008 Agreement, which states that the winner in the Albanian community selects the winner partner in the Macedonian community. Respect for this principle is essential - to preserve the importance that the Albanian community has and to preserve the logic of the elections among the Albanians themselves". However, due to its interests, or to internal and external pressure, DUI decided to make a coalition with the non-winning SDSM party. It was DUI that prompted the deal and was the same one that broke it, so based on former Prime Minister Gruevski's statements, this kind of deal could run the risk of being canceled in the next election as well, or maybe forever. The VMRO-DPMNE leader in an interview with Dnevnik recalled that the principle of a coalition of the two winning parties was established in the 2008 elections after the so-called May Agreement between VMRO-DPMNE and DUI was reached. Gruevski then recalled the events that preceded the deal and stressed that if this time the Agreement were breached, nothing would oblige his party to a coalition with the victorious Albanian party in the future. "If now DUI goes in coalition with the second, instead of the first party, with the defeated instead of the winner, it will certainly mean establishing a new practice and tradition in Macedonia, which we will, of course, adapt to, not only now, but also in the future," answers Gruevski to the question of Dnevnik (tocka.com.mk, 2017). As we can notice, even 18 years after this Framework Agreement all essential political issues are still resolved between closed doors between the political Elites, leaving little room for citizen participation and influence over the Elites, except for elections (Nasevski: 11).

It must be acknowledged that in general Ohrid Peace Agreement achieved a degree of stability and security, and also prohibited the territorial division of the country. We can conclude that the Framework Agreement tensions over ethnocultural identities and some ambiguities were overcome, preventing the destruction of Northern Macedonian society. The Ohrid Agreement for the Republic of North Macedonia and its citizens is essential because it has proven that this country can, wants and politically knows how to realize its multicultural content. (Maleska, 2005: 6) For some, the Agreement is seen as a very zero-sum game, during which the profit for one of the communities will undoubtedly mean a loss for the other party.

## 6 Balance of Power as part of consociative Democracy

According to Lijphart, there are nine background variables that, when present, can favor the establishment of consociative Democracy. Five of these variables are strongly linked to the size of the ethnic groups and to their distribution over the territory. One of the first criteria listed by the author is: the similar size of the groups, that should allow some balance of power among them (Lijphart, 2008: 52). If we base on the last census of 2002 North North Macedonia is officially home to 64.2 percent of the Macedonian population, while over 25.2 percent of the Albanian population, about 10 percent of Turks, Serbs, Vlachs, Bosniaks. (State Statistical Office, 2002) The dispute over the census of population, the strong insistence of the Albanian minority that the full application of the power-sharing mechanisms requires, first of all, to register the precise *size* of the ethnic groups, the conflict over the results (contested by both Macedonians and Albanians, the first claiming that census overestimated the number of Albanians, the second claiming the contrary) and the arguments often heard by the Macedonian nationalists, who call for a rise in the birth rate in order to avoid Macedonians to become a minority in their own state, again testify the importance that the stability of size has in the inter-ethnic political relationships. This battle went so far so even the model of consociational Democracy become changeable in in the forecasts of internal researchers, based on the numerical proportion of ethnic similarities: some chose the Swiss political model, while others the Belgian model. Naturally, if we compare Switzerland with the Republic of Northern Macedonia, many similarities can be observed through this prism: In Switzerland, the percentage of the German-speaking population is 63.5%, French speakers 22.5%, Italian speakers 8.1% and Roman speaking people. 0.5%. In Northern North Macedoniathis percentage is similar, i.e. Macedonians are 64%, Albanians are 25% and other smaller ethnic communities in North Macedonia are 10%; Globally, both countries are small in terms of territory (Switzerland is number 135 in the world and North North Macedonia148 in the world); Despite the Swiss model for Macedonia, there are some ideas, notably by representatives of the Albanian community, for a reorganization of Macedonia's consensual model using the Belgian example as "a heterogeneous multi-level multiparty community". This idea partly derives from what Boshler pointed out for North Macedonia as a country with a small majority (Macedonian) and a large (Albanian) minority, which is partly similar to that of Flemish (relative majority 57%) and Walloon (far from minority community 42%) citizens in the total Belgian population. (Ambarkov, 2016)

Therefore, as far as the size is concerned, we are in the same line with what Roeder and Rothchild (2005) argue, the *stability* in the two groups' size, rather than size itself, turns out to be the most crucial factor. Among the conditions for the consolidation of peace and Democracy through the use of power-sharing, Roeder and Rothchild argue that more than the relative size of the groups, it is important that the relationship between the size of the two groups does not change in time.

The answer to the question of whether the consociational model is more appropriate for small countries than for the big ones, according to the Lijphart's interpretation, is – for little countries. Because there is a higher probability that Elites know one

another personally and that their mutual contacts are more frequent, and because small countries feel more endangered from other powers than the big ones, so that the feeling of vulnerability and insecurity creates a strong incentive among them for maintaining the internal solidarity (Dahl: 349). North Macedonia satisfies such criteria because the countries are rather small in population.

The second most crucial favorable pre-condition listed by Lijphart is the lack of socioeconomic disparities among the groups: "The second major factor is the absence or presence of large socioeconomic differences among the groups of a divided society" (Lijphart, 2008: 51). Moreover, in North Macedonia, there seem to be significant differences between the groups. In Macedonia, the Albanians sign a far higher unemployment rate than Macedonians (32% vs. 61%), even though we are uncertain about the extent to which such difference is caused by the large sector of the grey economy.

Last but most important, pre-condition for the success of Consociational Democracy in the ethnically divided societies is the presence of the "overarching loyalties that would reduce the exclusiveness of ethnic attachments" (Lijphart, 2008). The only goal that Macedonians and Albanians appear to have in common is the Macedonian Euro-Atlantic integration. This has been the reason why almost every Agreement between the two main communities has ended successfully. In North Macedonia, the peace Agreements were negotiated through the mediation of international actors. EU, NATO, was the international actors most strongly involved in the conflict settlement and peacebuilding. The question remains whether the country will succeed in surviving the fulfillment of its own dream, for once the common goal is reached if not even some feebly shared identity is created, it is difficult to imagine what factors will be able to compensate for strong internal centrifugal tendencies.

## **7 Conclusion**

Consociational Democracy has become the international community's preferred remedy for building peace and Democracy after civil wars" (Roeder & Rothchild, 2005a). However, this political model is increasingly seen as a short-term solution to be followed by other, presumably more democratic and lasting arrangements. (Bogaards, 2006: 121) Additionally, in our case study, according to Florian Bieber, North Macedonia is a "minimalist consociational system" because it alienates smaller ethnic communities, thus creating only ethnic perspectives on political life in North Macedonia, rather than supporting a real political consociational system.

Benjamin Reilly (2002: 159) advocates for an electoral system in which politicians would not depend only on voters of their ethnic group. Reilly calls this approach "centripetalism" The centripetal model explains the stable political systems, that is, the citizens within the state space have managed to overcome the major fractures and divisions that exist between them by negotiation and by cooperation. Centripetal Democracy in a state can be demonstrated in the following 3 cases:

1. Electoral initiative used by parties to attract votes from different ethnicities
2. Enabling the negotiating arena in which political actors of different groups have an

initiative to achieve Agreements about electoral support; 3. Creating coalitions with multiethnic political parties.

If we go back to our case study, namely North Macedonia, “all parties in North Macedonia are ethnic in the sense that their membership and voter base comes entirely from one ethnic group” (Berglund, Ekman, Deegan-Krause, & Knutsen, 2013: 617). However, in the last parliamentary elections (2018) the surprise during this period was that LSDM claimed that will win the Albanian votes as well, which in the past there were only rare cases. According to Zekiri, an LSDM Albanian deputy: "For the first time, this political subject was also opened to Albanians because its vision was North Macedonia to be the same country for all citizens, regardless of their ethnic background. The Albanians understood this well, and for this reason, they also condemned the Albanian parties that have represented them so far in the form in which they have governed (brif.mk, 2016).

At first view, the Albanian votes for LSDM seem like a positive signal and a courageous step in the policymaking of the Republic of Macedonia. However, given that fact that such attempts have been taken in the past and they have not proved successful, it is too early to assume that the society is on the right track, not forgetting the fact that this step was undertaken only by the Albanian side and never by the Macedonian one. (Çupi, 2018: 732). It is too early to conclude whether this is a real change in the SDSM's political program and the arrival of a new era of political model from ethnic to multiethnic parties, or is it just a trick to pull Albanian votes, but however, we can conclude that if the VMRO and the DUI retained their power for 15 years as a result of their secret consensual "May Agreement", SDSM is now attempting to integrate the political system of North Macedonia into a centripetal Democracy. They have fulfilled two conditions so far: They won votes from Albanian citizens; Achieve Agreements on electoral support; Now only had to make a pre-election coalition with Albanian parties to meet the three criteria. Time will tell whether it will be their next step.

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