

The Process of Democratisation, the Political Parties and the Electoral Systems in the Western Balkans (1990–2020)

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Abstract

At the end of the twentieth century, the transition from non-democratic regimes has been the most important political event in the Western Balkans. The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 paved the way to the sudden collapse and breakdown of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and in the Western Balkans, albeit some of them did already show a growing decline. Despite the variation in terms of institutional framework and electoral systems, the Western Balkan countries do present difference in some aspects of the political system but not for all the variables considered. The different scenarios that involved the Western Balkan countries during the armed conflicts have generated often negative outcomes in terms of democratic performances, or better have exacerbated persistent resistances to the democratic strengthening from the political actors. The factors beyond these different patterns can be indicated in three main areas: (1) the type of democratic transition and the role of the different actors in the process, (2) the influence of the political parties and their genetic features and (3) finally, considering the context, the impact of the war in the country

Keywords

Western Balkans, democratisation, electoral systems, political parties

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The Legacy of the Past in the Democratisation of the Western Balkans

At the end of the twentieth century, the transition from non-democratic regimes has been the most important political event in the Western Balkans (WBs).¹ The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 paved the way to the sudden collapse and breakdown of the communist

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regimes in Eastern Europe and in the WB,² albeit some of them did already show a growing decline.

The WBs represent a tricky puzzle even in terms of definition. Some countries are included and some others are excluded depending on the authors' sensibility and orientation, as well as on the methodological approach that is adopted. Therefore, to a geographical definition can be associated also a cultural one (Crampton, 2002; Mazower, 2002; Prevelakis, 1997). Together with the linguistic and ethnic patterns, WBs are also defined, obviously in historical and political terms. If the Balkans refer to a vast area from the Adriatic to the Black sea and in some cases including also Greece, from a narrower perspective, the WBs cover the territory that roughly corresponded to the former Yugoslavia.³ Albeit the latter was not included under the direct control of the Soviet Union influence, the authoritarian regime was closer to Moscow than to the Western alliance, in both cultural and political terms, while Albania in the latest Fifties aligned with China and denounced the Khrushchev's revisionism. Vice versa, one of the Josip Tito's regime strengths was that the Yugoslav partisans were the sole force to defeat the Nazi-fascists without a significant support of the USSR army but rather with a contribution from the English. Indeed, Belgrade was the only capital of Eastern Europe to be freed by local forces and not by the Soviet Union ones (Krulic, 1997). Then Tito led the country for about three decades. Moreover, even if for a short period the Yugoslav federation tried the path of the not aligned countries, due to geopolitical and historical factors, there was a clear political and ideological pattern leaning more on the East than the West. The Tito-Stalin split in 1948 represented the attempt of the Yugoslavia to play an 'independent' role in politics but also in socio-economic terms. These latter in fact showed lesser dirigisme than in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics albeit under a watchful control of the regime. In this sense, it is crucial to consider the democratic transition patterns of the WB countries (Bielasiak, 2002; Lijphart, 2012).

However, although the crisis of the Soviet regime was an important trigger of such process, the domestic effects generated have been different depending on whether countries were included under the Russian umbrella or not, although with different levels of intensity (for example, Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary transited to democracy as fast as some WB countries like Croatia and Slovenia). In particular, the Eastern Europe had a different democratic transition path despite to that followed in the WBs. In fact, the previous have experienced a first democratic strike before WWII (Huntington, 1993) and also a few unfruitful attempts after such as in Prague in 1968, Budapest in 1956, among others – while the ex-Yugoslavia did not. Furthermore, the Eastern Europe countries – Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, in particular – were the preferred target of the Western leverages (Levitsky and Way, 2006), as those aimed at guaranteeing membership of NATO or the EU in exchange for democratic progress. An additional element of distinction crucial from a geopolitical point of view, is that Yugoslavia and Albania were not part of the Warsaw Treaty.⁴ And it was only in 1985 that Mikhail Gorbachev started to dismantle the Soviet empire and in particular the concept and the politics of 'limited sovereignty' that characterised the Russian influence over the satellite states falling under its military umbrella, that was known as the Brezhnev doctrine (Gaidar, 2007). Therefore, if the crisis of Yugoslavia and the transition of its countries to democracy were certainly also favoured by the end of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin wall, other relevant factors should be taken in high consideration to avoid a miscellaneous that would include all cases in one category. However, the multinational Yugoslavian federation faced its own disaster and collapse mostly following a severe economic crisis that dramatically

impacted its internal unity (Hayden, 2013). These economic difficulties raised importantly namely after the Tito's death in 1980, and it contributed enormously to the federation disintegration. Moreover, the Tito's death combined with the economic crisis brought to the collapse of the Yugoslavian regime. In fact, Tito represented a strong unifying factor for the six 'nations' of the federation. These differences were especially due to the pre-existing regime, as well as to the nature of the socio-political systems. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia included six republics: Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, all governed by one-party regime, the Communist one. The 1990 represented an internal milestone in the Federation's history and fate as in all six nations there were multiparty elections. Albeit, they cannot be considered as full democratic they represented a first step towards a truly competitive arena considering that the League of Communist of Yugoslavia fell apart at the beginning of the year (Mihajlov, 1991: 79). Then, together with the more opened political arena there was a nationalist upsurge that fuelled the attempt to keep under control and to moderate the will of independence. The dream of a 'new' Federal Republic of Yugoslavia which in fact remained with Serbia and Montenegro only, was not possible. The Serbian nationalism brought to the war eventually (Mansfield and Snyder, 2005).

The Transition From the Authoritarian and Totalitarian Regimes

The vast literature on the democratisation and regime change process has tested different hypotheses, including internal and external factors. Scholars as Guillermo O'Donnell and Philipp Schmitter (1986) emphasised the political actors' strategic choice, who were opposite to the dilemma of reforming weak regimes or changing them. Differently, Samuel Huntington (1991) has argued that the external factors are the most important variables affecting the democratic process, albeit he did not omit the influence of socio-political factors, such as economic factors and religion. The nature of the external factors can be twofold. On one hand, they can take the shape of agency-related and short to medium-run variables, acting as linkage and leverage within bilateral or multilateral relations (Bieber, 2018; Levitsky and Way, 2006). On the other hand, they can take the shape of structural and long-run variables, acting as diffusion mechanisms or contagion effects (Brinks and Coppedge, 2006; Bunce, McFaul, and Stoner Weiss, 2009; Huntington, 1991).

Together with these elements, I argue that the institutional context should also be included for a better understanding of the consolidating of the democratic regimes and the impact on the institutions building process (Elklit, 1999). In particular, the electoral systems are pivotal factors in defining opportunities and constraints for new and old actors and for qualifying the democratic process per se. Moreover, the parties' features (Panebianco, 1988; Passarelli, 2015), their institutional preferences, and their political attitudes are crucial in the process of democratic consolidation. As new political actors intervened in a new institutional and social scenario, the WB's parties need to be analysed through *ad hoc* analytical lens which consider their specificities and similarities with other European parties. Therefore, we make reference to the concepts of personalisation and presidentialisation to see if and how much the Balkanian political parties – their organisational features (Garzia, 2014; Panebianco, 1988; Samuels, 2002; Samuels and Shugart, 2010), their institutionalisation (Harmel and Svåsand, 2019) – fit the new democratic pattern of the region, and to what extent their organisational features lie on the legacy of the previous regime.

Therefore, it is important devoting attention to the study of the interplay between the democratic process, the choice of the electoral systems (Birch, 2005; Birch et al., 2002; Blais and Dion, 1990; Bochsler, 2010; Colomer, 2005; Millard, 2004) and the role of the political parties in the new democracies in the WBs (Passarelli, 2019b; Stojarová and Emerson, 2009). This region is very important to understand the differences in the democratic paths in different contexts and especially as compared with Western Europe and Eastern Europe alike.

Other reasons rely on the fact that after 1989 many questions about the democratisation and democracy become crucial as to expand the explanation beyond the 'western' borders. Recently, Coppedge and others measured and tested the impact and the salience of several factors accounted as important to pave the way to democracy and/or its decline (Coppedge et al., 2022). Focussing on data coming from the national contexts, I shed light on the interaction between the main political actors in the process of democratic building.

The value that this approach will add to the literature streams from a twofold perspective. The outcome presented in this special issue is not a mere sum or collection of *similar* articles, as they all contribute to shed light on the general research question. Conversely, the contributions follow the same methodological and theoretical pattern here identified so to converge in a consistent contribution on the topic of *Democratisation and regime change in the Western Balkans*, that is a region that has historically shown a strategical importance. Following the theoretical and empirical pattern enlightened and justified in this article, each paper presents the case study not only as such but by emphasising the comparative perspective. Individual contributions are at the core of a wider interpretation of the political phenomena that this article is aiming to analyse and to which all together contribute to disentangle. Thus, the papers are not *isolated*, but they respond to a general research question in both theoretical and empirical terms. If on one side they furnish crucial elements to the understanding of the single cases they are analysing, on the other side, they proceed following a common scientific comparative path.

From a methodological point of view, I follow a diachronic comparative study of the WB countries. Three of them are directly included in this special issue, and others are considered for a comparison based on data and indicators in this article. In addition, on the empirical part, each country expert report data, information and descriptive parts on topics common to all the special issue. Therefore, the whole special issue is going beyond a mere collection of separate contribution but rather as a *unified* scientific outlet that analyse a common topic where individual papers shed light on specific national aspects but always bearing in mind the general framework.

Do the WB countries show a common democratic transitional pattern? And how can the possible different outcomes in terms of regime building be explained? To detect similarities and differences in the paths that have conducted the ex-Yugoslavia countries to the transition from the authoritarian regime to new democratic contexts, this article and the special issue adopt a comparative approach. Starting from the literature on the 'democratic transition', I aim to test who has led the democratic process, the alliance and the coalition s/he has used, and what socio-political resources were activated. Were the WB region representing a common 'market' for the democratic transition, we would expect to have also a similar 'trend' in terms of institutional and political outcomes. To this purpose, the special issue presents comparative data and individual focuses on singular cases on a series of variables related to the political system. The number of political parties, the institutional regime, the electoral system, the personalisation of political parties, the role

of the leader and the leadership, the influence of 'minorities' and the influence of cleavages are among the most important factors that are going to be deeply analysed and compared. The hypothesis we are going to test is related to the impact of the institutional features' choice on the democratic consolidation process. Therefore, a set of tables and figures will be presented in each article. The article compares the process of regime change and the following process of democratisation that sorted after the 1989 events and the WB's internal conflict to see whether it is possible to detect a common pattern or if important differences arise. Therefore, I sum up the comparative conclusion on the process of democratisation in WBs: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia.

Democracy in the WBs: Constitutions, Electoral Systems and Parties

With the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, the democratic transition has started or accelerated in all (ex)Communist countries. In this context, the WBs do represent a peculiar case due to their common political, cultural and geographical pattern. Moreover, they all sorted from the previous Yugoslavian regime that kept together different 'nations' representing socio-political cleavages, and they were linked by a common political history after 1918. The path to the democratisation has been uneven and dramatically marked by the bloody wars that exploded fuelling ethnical and national divisions (Sekulic, 2002).

As indicated, the most similar cases approach aims to detect differences in a context where the triggers for regime change were similar. The analysis starts with the focus on the different Constitutions. The institutional regimes that have been installed in each country depend on the role that has had the political actors leading the democratic process, their interests and features. Therefore, we should expect to detect variation in terms of institutional framework being affected by the role of the different political interactions during a crucial phase. Together with the institutional framework we take into account the provisions protecting minorities, the civil rights, the balance of power and national/federal organisation of the state as reproducing internal differences also emerged during the democratic transition process (Linz, 1990).

An important test of the implementation of the democratic principle is the adoption of the electoral system as a tool to integrate or to exclude important actors from the representation. Comparing data on seven cases – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia – I put in evidence common features and important differences among the electoral systems (Bochsler, 2010) as a crucial aspect in reproducing and representing different interests. The analysis will not simply follow a descriptive pattern, but it will focus on the aspects related to the democratic process for each system. In addition, the study of the interplay between the democratic process, the choice of the electoral systems and the role of the political parties in the new democracies in the WBs is an important step.

Cases and Data: A Comparison

The WB countries show several similarities but also important differences in terms of their democratic path as well as in constitutional and institutional terms. The Balkan countries represent an important region to be analysed using a comparative perspective due to their peculiarities in several fields.

The main socio-political trait that the WB countries have in common is the recent past of the war. The so-called Yugoslav Wars were a series of ethnic conflicts that involved basically almost all the territories of the countries we are analysing in this book (excluding Albania, which was not part of the Yugoslav territory). Though with different levels of intensity, the wars of independence and insurgencies involved the greater part of the former Yugoslavia from 1991 to 1999/2001 (Kaldor, 2012). The trigger for the war was mainly related to the declaration of independence of the republics of the Yugoslav state. The most important point to remember is that those actions were based on issues relating to the claims of ethnic minorities, such as Serbs (which were the relative majority, in fact), Croats and Albanians. As to the existence of politically and culturally rooted ethnic cleavages, as well as the quest for independence by distinct national groups whose presence on the territories overlapped.

These countries present interesting elements in terms of the process of democratisation, the form of government and institutional assets, the presence of social cleavages (religious, linguistic, ethnic) and, of course, the nature of the political parties (Passarelli, 2019a). The latter is somehow very different from other European cases, especially in terms of their origins, organisation and structure (Passarelli, 2019b: 1). In institutional terms, the WB cases show variation across the regime types. For the semi-presidential case and its sub-types, we have five countries: Macedonia (1991), Montenegro (2006), Serbia (2006), Slovenia (1992) and Croatia (1991). Both Albania (1991) and Kosovo (2008) are parliamentary regimes. Finally, Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995) represents a peculiar presidential case with a federal structure based on national parliaments and presidents. The focus on ex-Yugoslavia countries is therefore very important for both theoretical and empirical reasons. Moreover, the different paths in the process of democratisation and the subsequent constitutional frames they have adopted, as well as the various patterns in parties' birth and development, are important variables to be considered to observe variation in democratisation.

Although it is not the only one, the ethnic cleavage is certainly important to understand and to explain political dynamics in post Yugoslavian countries. Bosnia and Herzegovina is characterised by two basic components, namely, civic and ethnic. These two components define Bosnia and Herzegovina as a state that is, at the same time, a state of its citizens but also a state of constituent peoples living in that area: Bosniak, Croat and Serb, and members of 'others'. In such perspective, the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina provided the constituent peoples with greater collective national rights than members of 'others' ethnical groups since they were the first to be represented in the decision-making structures of state institutions.

Montenegro was the previous Yugoslav republic to remain linked to Serbia after the split of the other countries of the federation after 1990. The Serbian-Montenegrin cohabitation resulted in a division and consequent separation as the small republic of the old Titograd capital claimed and obtained its independence in 2006, after a very disputed constitutional referendum (Vujovic and Tomovic, 2019). The constitutional choice resulted in a semi-presidential regime, albeit with an important role of the premier-minister. The electoral system is a proportional one with a unicameral parliament. The adherence to the NATO in 2017 and the process of EU membership have consolidated the democratic institutions despite the permanent ruling party was the Socialist one. However, in 2020 the alternation in government and the peaceful transition of power between the incumbent and the oppositions have clearly represented a step forward in terms of democracy strengthening.

Kosovo too emerged from the dissolution of ex-communist state of Yugoslavia. The country experienced a war and the international military intervention. As a result, the United Nations took over all functions of the state for a long period. This external actor played a crucial role in designing the electoral system: proportional representation with preferential voting (Passarelli, 2020). In this line of thinking, the impact of a high personalised electoral system on the intra-party democracy has been compelling. In fact, the personalisation of the electoral system means the introduction of mechanisms that ensure a greater role for voters in the election of their parliamentary representatives.

The democratisation process of the Republic of Macedonia took rather different directions compared with the rest of WB countries. Macedonia avoided the bloodshed that invested other countries and produced democratic institutions through the adoption of a new constitution in 1991. Two important aspects of the democratisation process⁵ were partially solved and thus have been shaping the political system: (1) interethnic relations manifest through the contestation between the majoritarian ethnic Macedonians and the biggest minority group – ethnic Albanians, and (2) the contested national identity building process by neighbouring countries, as exemplified by the name dispute with Greece and controversies about the origins of language and the interpretation of history with Bulgaria. These two issues have shaped the party system and created rather stable political divisions between left and right. Macedonia has changed its electoral system three times during the process of transition, moving from a majoritarian two-round system in 1990 and 1994, to mixed-member proportional representation in 1998, and to proportional representation since 2002. These changes, however, did not have a significant influence on the party system. The Social Democratic Union of Macedonia party – which originated from the Communist Party – on the left and the anti-communist Christian democratic party VMRO DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) on the right remained in fact the two main political actors.

Serbian transition has been initiated just before the breakup of Yugoslavia. Due to pre-emptive reform, former communist leader Slobodan Milosevic took power on the first pluralistic elections and ruled with semi-authoritarian fashion for the entire decade. After the defeat of his regime, Serbia re-started democratic transition, ending international isolation and reconnecting with the Western world. As clearly indicated by Dušan Spasojević (2022) the Serbian transition was initiated from the top, in a process described by Kitschelt et al. (1999) as ‘preemptive reform’. The leading actor was the Communist party under the control of Milošević who also was the country’s president. In a sense, following Sartori (1976), Serbia represented a case of predominant party. Serbia achieved at least minimal democracy with aspiration for EU membership, until the recent democratic crisis under the rule of Serbian Progressive Party. Serbia has been designed as a semi-presidential regime with strong Prime Minister and relatively weak president (premier-presidentialism). Over time the institutions and democracy deteriorated due to the centralisation of power by the president Hlousek (2013) and lack of check and balances, such as institutions, civil society and media or by internal party competition Stojiljković Z and Spasojević D (2016) and Spasojević D and Stojiljković Z (2019). The parliamentary electoral system is proportional with closed lists (one national constituency), so providing favourable circumstances for power sharing arrangements and consensual relations between parties that helped the development of minimal democracy after the democratic revolution in 2000.

In Croatia, as indicated by Cakar and Cular (2022), in some sort the electoral system worked at the same time as the panacea and the problem for the quality and stability of

the democratic institutions. After the first decade of democratic transition, the electoral rules were strategically engaged by the HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union, centre-right party) to secure its domination and authoritarian type of democracy (Levitsky and Way 2020), and the introduction of the PR in 1999 marked the start of the full-scale consolidation of Croatian democracy. Coupled with the subsequent constitutional changes, the PR deployed positive effects by reducing the polarisation (Nikić Čakar D and Krašovec A 2021), in a context where the coalition is the norm. At the same time, when democracy in Croatia started to deteriorate due to negative economic circumstances and increasing low levels of trust in representative institutions and widespread citizens' disaffection with the functioning of democracy, the electoral system was identified as the main cause of the crisis (Finn, 2021). Yet, the adoption of the preferential voting did not impact within a party system characterised with stable and dominant role of established party identities.

Slovenia represents a vivid example of stability of the electoral system, which is characterised by a low parliamentary threshold (Grad, 1997). That element clearly represents a distinguishing factor despite most of the other countries in the region. As indicated by Fink-Hafner and Novak (2022) the highly fragmented and open party system lacked to convey a sufficient consensus on the electoral system changes. Moreover, in terms of the balance of power as emerged after the independence were a mix of bottom-up and top-down pressures and movements. Therefore, the choice of a proportional electoral system was combined with the parliamentary constitutional choice (Cerar, 1996; 2002). Finally, the Slovenia's noninvolvement in wars truly represent a peculiar element vis-a-vis other countries in the WBs where the armed conflict has clearly interfered with institutional choices and party system's characteristics (Fink-Hafner and Krašovec, 2019).

What We Learnt From the Democratisation Process in the WBs

The study devoted to the institutional features represents one of the main focuses in the field of democratisation process especially when assessing the degree of democratic consolidation and the quality of democratic regimes. Together with the formal constitutional and institutional framework, the political system's features clearly represent an important factor to test the democracy strength but also the impact on the political actors' behaviour. Therefore, the attention to the electoral systems as the central institutional mechanism and the party's systems characteristics (format, mechanic, polarisation) are important to analyses due to their relevance on the democratic delegation (Hoffman, 2005) and accountability chain (Nikolenyi, 2011). This institutional approach emphasised the role of formal procedures but do not underestimate the impact of the political actors, and the political parties in particular (Passarelli, 2015). Informal and non-institutional variables must be considered as well, especially in new democracies with weak institutions (Dolenec, 2013; Morgenstern et al., 2019; Raunio and Sedelius, 2019). In terms of the electoral systems, we have seen that most of former Yugoslavia countries, except Slovenia and Montenegro, have experienced a large variety of electoral systems and changes to them.

Despite the variation in terms of institutional framework and electoral systems, the WB countries do present difference in some aspects of the political system but not for all the variables considered. Table 1 reports the main characteristics of the political system in the WBs. The concentration of votes and seats was particularly polarised around the two biggest parties in Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia, with score well above 60%. So,

Table 1. The Political and Party Systems in the WBs (1990–2020).

Country	Period (average)	Two biggest parties		Parliamentary groups	Gallagher's index	Effective number of parties (votes)	Effective number of parties (seats)	Relevant parties (Sartori)	Index of parliamentary fragmentation (Rae)	Parties with > 4% of votes	Volatility	Index of nationalisation
		votes (%)	seats (%)									
Bosnia–Herzegovina	1996–2018	56.5	47.3	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	4.6	n.a.	11.6	n.a.	n.a.
Croatia	1990–2020	65.0	69.2	12.9	11.1	4.1	3.6	6.7	0.7	7.1	19.8	9.2
Kosovo	2010–2019	56.1	53.3	8.0	3.1	4.9	5.3	5.3	0.8	14.8	14.9	n.a.
Serbia	1990–2020	59.1	71.4	8.2	8.7	5.0	4.5	9.3	0.6	17.5	22.6	n.a.
Slovenia	1992–2018	49.4	53.7	7.5	8.0	5.8	5.3	5.5	0.8	7.5	31.2	0.9
Montenegro												

Source: Author's elaboration on national parliaments' databases.

Table 2. The Freedom Ranking of the WB Countries (2017–2022).

Country	Period	Average	Status
Bosnia–Herzegovina	2017–2022	45.7	Partly free
Croatia	2017–2022	85.5	Free
Kosovo	2017–2022	54.0	Partly free
Serbia	2017–2022	68.2	Partly free
Slovenia	2017–2022	93.0	Free
Montenegro	2017–2022	65.5	Partly free
North Macedonia	2017–2022	61.7	Partly free

Source: Author's adaptation from Freedom House.

considering the differences in terms of the electoral systems in these cases, it arises the central role of the parties and their genetic (Passarelli, 2015). Yet, despite this concentration of seats around the two main parties of the country, it comes that the parliamentary fragmentation is not low at all as in fact the number of relevant parties is well above six in all the three cases. This implies that the strength and the impact of the democratic process had to face socio-political resistance from the legacy of the past, which dramatically impact on the further democratic development. Despite, too simplistic interpretation of the WBs as a whole quasi-identical region without difference, the special issue I edited and the article here contribute to shed light on the patterns that each country followed overtime. The question of why these countries' experiences have differed may refer to three main causes. The factors beyond these different patterns can be indicated in three main areas: (1) The type of democratic transition and the role of the different actors in the process. The role of the ruling class affected the power relations between the incumbent party and the opposition that can be conducive of different patterns in terms of institutional choices as well as multi-party elections (Benoit, 2004; Ibenskas and Sikk, 2017; Lijphart, 1991; Lewis, 1997). (2) The influence of the political parties and their genetic features. The role of parties' leadership, their nature can affect in fact the party systems development (Enyedi and Casal Bértoa, 2011; 2018), the internal democracy and the level of competition (Haughton and Deegan-Krause, 2015). Some of them have found more fruitful to 'shape those [electoral] rules to their advantage rather than shaping their strategies to the rules' (Birch, 2003: 17). For example, as argued by Birch et al. (2002: 17) Communist parties tended to favour single member districts due to the role of their candidates and the national distribution of their support (Bochsler, 2009). (3) Finally, considering the context, the impact of the war in the country (Fink-Hafner and Hafner-Fink, 2009). The different scenarios that involved the WB countries during the armed conflicts have generated often negative outcomes in terms of democratic performances, or better have exacerbated persistent resistances to the democratic strengthening from the political actors (Table 2).

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Notes

1. Here I do refer to the end of the authoritarian regimes. In terms of ‘quality’ of democracy, in fact not all the countries moved towards a ‘full’ democratic regime. Indeed, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and North Macedonia are considered hybrid or partially free (see Table 2).
2. The six Yugoslav federal republics had different levels of ‘autonomy’ depending on their role in the national state. Albania was the other authoritarian regime in the region.
3. The European Union includes Albania in the WB category <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/it/sheet/168/i-balceni-occidentali>
4. Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary and Poland. Albania was part of the Warsaw Treaty until 1968 and it is considered as a WB country in some analysis, so it represents an exception also due to its authoritarian regime, which was mostly isolated from both Moscow and Belgrade.
5. The constitution was adopted without the consent of the ethnic Albanian representatives. Then the inter-ethnic relations revision stage resulted in the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) in 2001 that concluded the short inter-ethnic conflict. Finally, there was a democratic backlash during the regime of Gruevski (2006–2007).

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