

CONSENSUAL DEMOCRACY IN NORTH MACEDONIA, ACCORDING TO ARBËN XHAFERI



Political Science

Keywords: politics, conflict, consensus, majoritarianism, over voting, equality, binational.

Flakron Bexheti

Faculty of Social Sciences. Mother Teresa University in Skopje. North Macedonia.

Abstract

In this study, focused on the political thought of Arbën Xhaferi, this politician, diplomat and philosopher, known among Albanians and beyond, his views on solving inter-ethnic problems within multi-ethnic states, which can lead to possible conflicts, are discussed. The unresolved issue of not only the rights of minorities in many countries can become the cause of inter-ethnic conflicts, which has been proven in history, from the oldest to the most recent one. Considering all these possible social crises, which according to Xhaferi can be resolved through the good will of the two parties in conflict, as an intellectual, politician and as a party leader, he took this issue seriously, even in the form of his practical action and engagement in solving problems of this nature, by being one of the participants in the Ohrid Framework Agreement, whose primary goal was to end the 2001 conflict in Macedonia, which erupted just because of the non-applicability of the rights of a large portion of Macedonian citizens at the time, such as the Albanians. In the study, in addition to Xhaferi's views on the issue of consensual decision-making, we also talk about the views of other personalities related to the phenomenon of consensual resolution of conflicts, such as Max Weber, Kavanagh, Maurice, Lijphart and others.

INTRODUCTION

Consensus democracy, as a form of government, was the primary goal of Arbën Xhaferi's political thought. His entire political activity was based on this principle, as the best form of settlement in multi-ethnic societies, aware that reaching genuine and complete consensus requires good will from both sides. The Macedonian side interprets the consensus according to its own interests, disagreeing with the assumption that the Albanians are equal to them, as a result of an agreement with the new rules of the game, imposed by this agreement. Without this mechanism, in no state of the world with a multi-ethnic society, equality would be achieved, not even long-term peace, therefore Xhaferi, starting from this principle, which was also the main pillar of the program of the party that he led, insisted that in a multi-ethnic society, like North Macedonia, without equal rights between ethnicities, there will be no stability. The Macedonian side, which could hardly be separated from the past, understood the consensus as the right of the majority to decide, through the power of the vote. Since the decision as a result of the full agreement of the parties is almost impossible, in many countries with developed democracies, mechanisms were put in place, so that the strongest gets the right to decide for others as well. Since after its independence, Macedonia remained a unitary state, a status which was reinforced with the Ohrid Framework Agreement, according to Xhaferi, it was more than necessary that decision-making at all levels of the state was made with the agreement of the parties, without infringing the right of each other. Without this internal cohesion, according to him, in the type of multi-ethnic societies, such as North Macedonia, there would always be ethnic-related problems. In order to achieve lasting peace in these states, "which in political theory are treated as segmented and heterogeneous societies, the same rights must be given to all individuals, without any segregation". If the different ethnicities enjoyed all these rights, there would be no lack of loyalty to the state; there

would be no manifestation of various gatherings with demands, which could even be radicalized into conflicts of catastrophic proportions. Such an experience was now proven with the conflict of 2001, which should serve as a lesson for the State of North Macedonia, to move towards internal development and its journey to the EU and NATO.

POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF ARBËN XHAFERI

The political activity, not separated from the theoretical political thought of Arbën Xhaferi, was based precisely on the principle of consensuality, as a universal value, which has been successful in many states with genuine democracy. If in countries like North Macedonia, the way of settlement with complete compatibility will not be respected, especially when the majority ethnic group does not consider the demands of the other, Xhaferi thought, the possibility of separation is not excluded, which is painful anyway, especially when separation is done through conflict. As a connoisseur not only of the circumstances within the state, but also of political phenomena, in the region, Europe and beyond, he was also visionary to draw attention to what tomorrow can bring, if an entire population is ignored, and is considered a second-class nation. Albanians, according to him, have always had the right to manifest their dissatisfaction through continuous movements, such as the demonstrations at the time of Tito's Yugoslavia, and onwards, including the period of 'democracy'. He supported these views of his in the historical past when he states that the great and very powerful empires, with all the imperial powers, did not succeed in maintaining their rule over others forever. With the concrete examples he brought, he constantly warned that a state that has not resolved the issues related to the rights of ethnic groups cannot have a future. If, according to him, the Empires, the most powerful in the world, could be disintegrated, how can small states, which have no political will for fulfilling the rights of others, remain. The solution according to Xhaferi's concept is very easy. A state can be stable only if it considers the ethnicity of the other, which is not the majority, as an ethnic element and not as a political element. He is against the concept of political nations, which implies ethnicity according to the name of the state, giving up ethnic origin. Such experiments, which the Macedonian political class tries to impose on the Albanians in various and perfidious ways even today, apparently without success, but when there is a lack of genuine consensus, apart from the "Badenter" decision-making mechanism, which they also manipulate with, the problems remain and any "status quo" only harms this country. In the absence of full consensus, according to him, problems of this nature are present even in some developed European countries. "We have argued that Europe was stabilized only when the success was achieved so that ethnic, linguistic and even religious borders became compatible with political borders. "Even in Europe, where there is no agreement of this nature, crises continue", Xhaferi would declare in Tetovo on 28/12/2004, for an unnamed newspaper.¹ And in this source, Xhaferi thinks that Macedonia will also continue to face problems of this nature. It has no other way, he states, either to be a multi-ethnic state, based on consensus between ethnicities, or it will not exist at all. Since, according to him, there is no other way, and the Albanians are ready for both options.

¹ Arben Xhaferi Work 04, Prishtina 2016, The ghastly return, p.401

POLITICAL THEORY AND ACTION METHODOLOGY OF ARBËN XHAFERI

Xhaferi's political theory and action methodology is based on his unwavering stance on establishing complete equality, as a result of resolving disputes through consensus. Based on these principles, we find that his commitment is coherent and corrective of all political actions that are detrimental to Albanians. In addition to the internal policy led by the governments of this country, he is also interested in the developments of foreign policy, aware that without the affirmation of the Albanian element of this country, even via foreign policy, it will hardly come out of internal marginalization, which, unfortunately, continues even after the Framework Agreement. The Albanians in this country are an undeniable reality and "neither the Albanians, nor the Macedonians, nor the internationals can deny this definition," Xhaferi states. He is adamant in this position, which is why he says: "If someone doesn't like the natural demand for equality, then they can ask for a divorce." This too is as natural, if not more so, than the unbearable coexistence, he says.² All these forms of extension and prolongation of negotiations by the Macedonian side, he states, only happen when it comes to the rights of Albanians.

Max Weber defined consensus as something that exists when our predictions about the behavior of others are realistic, because others will usually accept these predictions as valid for themselves and without any explicit agreement, while Kavanagh and Morris define the consensus as a series of parameters that define a series of political options that senior politicians and state officials considered administratively viable, economically feasible and politically acceptable.³ Xhaferi also, when talking about the consensus, mentions the reconciliation of the parties regarding the rights of the Albanians, which would bring equality with the Macedonians, in administration, economy and politics. Arend Lijphart states that in pluralist societies, divided along strict ethnic, religious and cultural lines, such as North Macedonia, consensual democracy, which is based on the division of power, should be framed. This type of democracy is the only alternative for the designers of the constitution.⁴ Xhaferi's views are also in full compliance with this opinion of Lijphart, when he commits to a constitution, where many issues are decided by full consensus. Until now, Xhaferi thinks, in the Republic of Macedonia, about a third of the population are marginalized, by another people with deep crises of self-identification. Such a Macedonia, he says, not only contradicts the Albanian interest of this country, but also the historical trend. In this regard, Xhaferi is pessimistic that this equality can be achieved; he had even discovered the tricks of this nature with the aim of not realizing the rights of the Albanians, during the negotiations of the Albanians and Macedonians at the Ohrid Peace Conference.

² Arben Xhaferi Act 04, Terrible return, Act 04, Pristina, p.402

³ Etem Aziri, The political system of the Republic of Macedonia, Tetovo 2012, pp. 140-141

⁴ Arend Lijphart, "Constitutional designs for divided societies" *Journal of Democracy*, 152 2004

The political determinations of Arbër Xhaferi, in the Republic of North Macedonia, were clear from the beginning of his political career, even though some of the points of his Party's platform, now, were more difficult to realize, since the constitutional changes had been made, which, unfortunately, did not advance the rights of Albanians, but on the contrary, Albanians also lost those rights inherited from Tito's Yugoslavia, guaranteed by the Constitution of 1974. From this constitution, approved without the vote of the Albanians in 1991, the laws conforming to it also came out, which made it even more difficult to realize the program articles of the party led by Xhaferi, but nevertheless, he continued to hope that one day, if he and his party won the trust of Albanians, they would implement the party program, which would be based on the solution of problems through the consensual path that had to do with the rights of Albanians. For such a reconciliation, in any case, according to him, mechanisms must be built that will prevent the manipulations of the Macedonian political leaders, who had understood the consensuality not as a correct agreement between two equal peoples, but only as a compromise whether or not the Albanians will agree with that many rights, that the other party would consider giving. In the election platform of 1998, he says, some of the demands of the Albanians of 1990 continue to be repeated. For these elections, the leader of the DPA (PDSH) had drawn up the following points of the election platform:

- Binational Macedonia
- Albanians as a constituent element in Macedonia
- Consensual democracy
- Consensual mechanism in deployment
- The institution of the Albanian vice-president of the state, which will oversee the fair functioning of the state on an ethnic basis.
- Educational, informative, cultural and other national institutions that will be the bearers of the creation of Albanian values in general.
- Creation of institutions for regional development.⁵

For all these quite normal demands, Xhaferi thought that they could be decided by consensus, and for this he had chosen the path of peace.

BINATIONAL MACEDONIA ACCORDING TO ARBËN XHAFERI

By striving for binational Macedonia, which means the state of the two main ethnicities, the Macedonians and the Albanians, where the minorities of this state would enjoy all the rights, he thinks of a politically stable and economically developed state, where the Albanian issue and their dispute with the Macedonians would eventually be resolved. With this type of state, he thinks, all frictions and constant fights between these larger communities would be eliminated.

⁵ Arbën Xhaferi, On consensual democracy, Zëri newspaper, April 15, 1998.

With the state of these two ethnic groups, the rights of minorities would not be endangered, because in the municipalities where they may be the majority, their rights would be realized according to the Law on Local Government, which also includes their official language in the local government. Even after the Ohrid Agreement, Albanians are considered a minority, even though the word "minority" is not mentioned, but it is still implied, both for Albanians and for others. In time, Xhaferi had understood the manipulations of the Macedonian side, who constantly tried to consider the requests of the Albanians, starting with the one for the officialization of the Albanian language, as requests of others, manipulating with the Law on Local Government, that the right of official use of the language is guaranteed at the local level, of course if they belong to the ethnic group with over 20%.

With the binational state, which would consist of Macedonians and Albanians, the rights of the Albanians, as a second population, would not even need to be discussed, because these equal rights with the Macedonians would be guaranteed by the constitution. There are enough models of these states; therefore such a solution would be better for the Macedonians themselves and Macedonia as a state.

With the Albanians as a constitutive element, he wanted to equate the Albanians with the Macedonians, because both peoples would be part of the preamble of the state constitution, with all their histories and commitments aimed at the national state, and in this case that state would function as binational. If these two nations were the bearers of the sovereignty of the state, the cold relations between them would be softened to a large extent, because in that case, the demands of the Albanians would have been resolved by the constitution and there would be no need to make them continuously through Albanian political party programs, at each election cycle.

ON CONSENSUAL DEMOCRACY

According to Xhaferi, consensual democracy, which, according to the concept of the long-term solution of the problems, which continue so many years after the Ohrid Agreement, is the democratic basis for solving the problems in complete harmony between the two peoples, the Albanians and the Macedonians, and if this reconciliation happens, it will be much easier for other minorities. Always when talking about the rights of the Albanians, it was calculated for the demands of the minorities, which confused the international factor, even though the '20%' of the Ohrid Agreement, unjustly, applied to the Albanians only. When talking about the peaceful period of political activity, without taking into account the two armed conflicts and their management, Xhaferi and the party he led, achieved visible successes in terms of reaching a consensus for the solution of some issues, starting with The Ohrid Agreement, where, as he says, the DPA (PDSH) platform was imposed, which prioritized the principle of consensual democracy and equal representation of Albanians in the state administration.

The institution of the Vice President of the state would also contribute to softening the irritating relations between the President and the Albanians, even though until now, in all election cycles, the Albanian factor has been decisive for the winner. This idea of his was not contrary to the request of the Albanians, that the head of state can also be an Albanian. In all election cycles for the head of state, between two or three candidates, the Albanian vote has determined the winner, therefore with a preliminary consensus between the coalitions, it is possible to reach an agreement that the functions of the President and the Vice President of the state are done in rotation. In this way, it would be impossible to ignore the Albanians from this important state body.

Educational, informative, cultural and other national institutions, which would be led by Albanian cadres, would improve the difficult situation of Albanians in this direction. According to his concept for settlement with complete compatibility between Albanians and Macedonians, which would be realized by the legitimate representatives of these two communities, these Albanian institutions, which will not be to the detriment of the Macedonian ones, would deal with the most sensitive issues of interest to Albanians in the field of culture, science, art, etc. From the to-date experience of the joint activity of these fields of national interest, he concluded, we are convinced that these activities did not present the reality of a multi-ethnic society, by ignoring the interests of Albanians, and even falsifying our history, by considering us as denizens (having come from other regions). His commitment to eliminating this discrimination was successful with the establishment of several institutions, with Albanian leaders and programs in various cultural, scientific and informative fields. For these achievements and successes of his, and the party he led, it took a lot of effort, wisdom and strong arguments that with these Albanian institutions, the Macedonians will not lose anything, on the contrary, the state and the whole society will gain. However, without a consensus with the Macedonian side through their political representatives in the parliament and government, these achievements would not have been successful.

THE CONCEPT OF STATE-BUILDING AND THE STABILITY OF MACEDONIA

Regarding the concept of state-building and the stability of Macedonia based on Arben Xhaferi's consensual decision-making, many analysts and university professors gave their opinions, who estimated that consensuality for multi-ethnic societies, like North Macedonia, is in the interest of the state, its long-term stability and secure future. Despite the perception that through his political engagement, he was only interested in the Albanian cause, by many intellectuals and political science specialists, he was appreciated as a politician according to whom, through the implementation of consensual democracy of power, between Albanians and Macedonians, the common state of all ethnicities who should enjoy all the rights, would be strengthened. Even the university professor, Mirjana Maleska, in the statement given to Radio, Deutsche Wele, on the occasion of Arbën Xhaferi's death, stated: "We agreed with him on how North Macedonia should function as a state, which would improve the inter-ethnic relations of its

citizens. He thought that the model of consensual democracy and the sharing of power between Macedonians and Albanians is the best solution for Macedonia. Even the conflict that occurred in this state ended in the spirit of his idea and thus he stabilized the state.” This is not what the professor of the "St. Cyril and Methodius" University, Biljana Bankovska thinks. She considers the concept of consensual decision-making for full equality of Albanians with Macedonians, as a nationalist rather than a democratic concept, and she would also state for the Deutsche Wele, among other things, that Arbën Xhaferi was a great ethnic leader and less a great democrat.

REFERENCES

- Agani, F. The language of violence and the voice of reason, Peje 2002
- Aziri, E. Political parties and democracy, 2004, Tetovo.
- Aziri, E. Political System of the Republic of Macedonia, October 2012.
- Aziri, E. The Importance of the Implementation of the Framework Agreement for the democratization of Macedonian society, published in the book: Implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, Skopje 2003.
- Bajalldzhiev, D. Political Science, Skopje, 2012
- Bajrami, A. Parliamentary Theory and Practice, Skopje 2000
- Bajrami, D., & Iseni, A. (2014). THE CHALLENGE OF (NON) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OHRID FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA. *European Scientific Journal, ESJ*, 10(10). <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2014.v10n10p%p>
- Document of the Ohrid Agreement, 2001
- Gurra, H. (2019). POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND A CONTINUING ACCOUNT FOR ELUSIVE PEACE IN REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA. ANGLISTICUM. Journal of the Association-Institute for English Language and American Studies, 7.
- Heyood, A. Politics, Pristina, 2008
- Klimovski, (1997). Ustaven i politicki Sistem, Skopje.
- Krasniqi, A. Political parties and political systems, Tirana
- Lijphart, A. (2004). Constitutional design for divided societies. *Journal of democracy*, 15(2), 96-109.
- Lijphart, A. Constitutional designs, *Journal of Democracy*, 252, 2004.
- Lijphart, A. Modeli Demokratije, Belgrade 2003
- Malevski, D. Sovremeni politicki sistem, Skopje, 1986
- Mircev, D. Dramata na Pluralizacijata, Skopje 1981
- Mojanovski, C. Socialeni politicki profil na partiite vo Makedonija, Skopje 1997
- Prizren Agreement, May 22, 2001
- Reka, B. (2011). The Ohrid Framework Agreement—a New Political Philosophy for the Functioning of a Multi-ethnic State. B. Reka, In Ten years from the Ohrid Framework Agreement: Is Macedonia Functioning as a multi-ethnic state, 11-19.

- Rousseau, J. J. (2011). *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality among Men*. New York: Bedford/St. Martins.
- Giovani, S. (1993). *Once again for the theory of democracy. The first part. Contemporary debate*. KNOWLEDGE. Tirana.
- Sartori, G. (2005). *Parties and party systems: A framework for analysis*. ECPR press.
- Xhaferi, A. On consensual democracy, "Zëri" magazine, Prishtina, 15/04/1998.
- Xhaferi, A. *Work 4*, Prishtina 2016.
- Xhunga, R. *12 Orders of Arbën Xhaferi*, Tirana, 2012.