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COALITIONS AS A FACTOR IN THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

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Abstract: The article studies the behavioral models of parties in democratic change in terms of building coalitions and concluding “pacts” within the framework of their own value system. The party coalitions established as a consequence of Armenia’s presidential and legislative elections over the past 20 years are analyzed. Since 2003, and to this day, coalitions in Armenia have assumed only the consolidation of political personalities pursuing power and the formation of coalitions with “minimal gain”. The ineffectiveness of the political coalition is due to the formal nature of thematic and doctrinal discussions as a result of the absence of genuine communication between the ruling elite. The method is supported by evidence that the inefficiency of coalitions established in Armenia during the democratic transition period suggests that coalitions are one of the causes of political growth crises only in terms of maintaining their own interest-based system.

With this method, the authors demonstrate the persistence of Armenia’s political development crises in the context of democracy transition.

Keywords: Democratic transition, political system, parties, party system, coalition government, parliamentary governance, responsibility, quality of democracy, political elite, parliamentary culture.

Party coalitions formed during the democratic transition actively coordinate their forces in order to obtain a position and role in political power. Based on election outcomes, this or that party applies to join forces with other party forces, and based on the value system of the political game of the time, the parties sign a contract establishing the principles of cooperative action and program provisions. However, whether the pacts are made with a zero or non-zero outcome, the

parties do not relinquish their viewpoints or fundamental disagreements. It is worth noting that the pact’s conclusion, theoretically based on the level of institutionalization of the democratic transition, contains the principles of the parties’ compromise actions, with the ensuing logic of reform implementation intertwined with the public agenda. In modern political science, studies performed from the standpoint of analyzing the efficacy and responsibility of coalition ma-

nagement in the process of democratic transition are addressed in numerous ways. In this regard, political scientists studying the pact-based politics of democratic transition (particularly the Moncloa Pact formed in Spain in 1977) M. Laver and K. Shepsley's (1996) approach, according to which ministers are responsible for the effectiveness of coalition administration of the "portfolio allocation" model (pp. 174-192). Furthermore, the political entity that has the most mandates is held accountable for coalition policies. At the same time, according to this model, the public's expectations of this branch department are directly dependent on the party responsible for the creation and implementation of the relevant ministry's policy.

Political scientists M. Lanny and J. Vanberg (2014) argued for the necessity to shift from non-institutional ("institutions-free") to institutional methods. The duty of coalition parties in the creation and successful integration of implemented public policy is not formalized under the "institutions-free" approach. As a result, from the standpoint of coalition agreement's efficacy, the institutional method is preferable for both monitoring government actions and procedurally controlling and reviewing legislative instruments. If, under conditions of democratic transition, the regime is unable to operate according to the aforementioned logic, then the socio-political plans produced by coalition administrations are unable to deliver a decisive influence in terms of the optimality of public policy. During the institutional approach, it is feasible not only to regulate the coalition government's parties, but also, if required, to question the actions of this or that minister and sector policy if they deviate from the coalition plan. It is evident from the preceding statement that the behavioral models of the parties in terms of forming a coalition, making compromises within it, and concluding "pacts" within the framework of their positions have a direct impact on the effective operation of executive and legislative institutions, as well as the quality of interaction between the legislative and executive branches of government. Using that as a foundation, let us show the party coalitions created as a consequence of the presidential and legislative elections held throughout the RA's democratic transition. It is undeniable that the "portfolio allocation" and "institutions-free" modes of establishing party coalitions coexisted

in RA. As a result of the methodical comparison of these models, each party's political duty, which has been of game nature for many years, has resulted in marginalization and alienation.

According to this rationale, the *first coalition* government in RA was created and functioned as a consequence of parliamentary elections held on May 25, 2003, between the Republican Party of Armenia- Rule of Law-Armenian Revolutionary Federation political forces in the third convocation of the National Assembly. However, during the normal session of the Parliament on May 22, 2006, the Chairman of the National Assembly A. Baghdasaryan announced his resignation. The exclusion of the party Rule of law from the ruling coalition was commented by A. Baghdasaryan with the coalition's differences compared with that of other parties, they were also related to existing social problems, the fight against corruption, the implemented privatization policy, European integration processes, and the possibilities for the development of relations with NATO (*NA speaker presents his resignation*, 2006). However, in this regard, it is necessary to state that in the memorandum of the political coalition, only one provision was fixed about the coalition's activity plan "1.2. The undersigned parties that supported the candidacy of Robert Kocharian in the presidential elections certify their responsibility to develop and implement a unified program of the government's activities based on the pre-election program of the President of the Republic and by coordinating their pre-election programs" (*Memorandum of Political Coalition*, 2003).

The fact that, according to the first point of the 2003 memorandum, the President of the Republic was a supporter of the coalition memorandum, while the real parties were considered sides (R. Kocharyan was not a member of any of the parties that signed the memorandum) is also noteworthy. However, with the powers granted by the 1995 Constitution, the president of the republic had a higher status over the other bodies of government (*RA Constitution*, 1995). He established the cabinet on the Prime Minister's recommendation and safeguarded the independence of the branches of government. According to the 2003 pact, the RA president proposed three ministers while the RPA nominated seven. The ideal of equality between political forces was clearly breached in the coalition's memoran-

dum, i.e., the real parties were players in a non-zero political game, which made the parties' conversations formal in achieving concessions. However, in addition to non-zero-sum processes, the requirements specified by the parties on public policy, which are aimed at defining the policy directions, principles, and methodology of the branch departments' strategic plans, are critical. The program priorities of the Republican Party of Armenia-Rule of law-Armenian Revolutionary Federation political coalition were correctly fixed within the framework of the coalition's memorandum; however, they did not reflect the parties' clear positions in the issues of overcoming the country's current political development crises, making the optimality of each party's activity and the coalition government in general even more vulnerable.

Following the legislative elections on May 12, 2007, a *second coalition* was established in the National Assembly of the fourth convocation, which differed in format from the first coalition, thus RPA and Prosperous Armenia signed coalition agreements, and with ARF cooperation agreements were signed. However, on April 22, 2009, following the signing of the Armenian-Turkish agreements, the ARF announced that it abandoned the coalition. There was one important difference between the 2007 political agreement reached by the parties and the 2003 political pact. A provision was included in the coalition agreement about choosing a single candidate for the 2008 presidential elections. However this provision was removed in the cooperation agreement with the ARF (*The coalition agreement is declassified*, 2007). However, the pact suffered from the same substantive flaw as the 2003 political coalition memorandum. The priority of the actions stated in the agreement did not represent the parties' stances in resolving the country's internal and foreign difficulties and challenges. This became the basis for the coalition agreement's early termination.

The third coalition was formed after the presidential elections on February 19, 2008 between four parties Republican Party of Armenia, Rule of Law, Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Prosperous Armenia. Unlike the two previous coalition agreements, the parties themselves considered this document unprecedented. According to Armenia's newly elected President of the Republic S. Sargsyan, the episode was

unique, as previous coalition agreements for the establishment of a coalition government had been signed. According to Rustamyan (authorized by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation for signing the coalition agreement), the document's signature has been delayed due to protracted discussions. "Here you will not find the now-familiar question of who has what positions, who should have what portfolios; we did not place any emphasis on this." We saw the key challenge as coordinating political concerns with the difficulties confronting our country today." According to G. Tsarukyan, society has expectations that each party should be held accountable for. "We must act instead of speaking." According to A. Baghdasaryan, the signed document was exceptional in that it established the political duty of the parties to confront the country's internal and exterior concerns (*The quadrilateral coalition is signed*, 2008).

However, the coalition agreement was unexpectedly terminated: the ARF withdrew from the coalition agreement in 2009, and the Prosperous Armenia withdrew after the 2012 parliamentary elections.

Following the 2012 parliamentary elections, the RPA and Prosperous Armenia signed the *fourth coalition* agreement, which was only valid for two years. On April 16, 2014, A. Baghdasaryan declared his desire to leave the power alliance, claiming that the coalition's collaboration was ineffective. A. Baghdasaryan believes "The RPA has an absolute majority in the National Assembly, which is sufficient to make nominations in crucial political positions without the permission of the coalition partner, denying the Rule of Law of having any influence in the process of making such significant decisions" (*The decision of the Rule of Law political council on the "inexpediency" of remaining in the coalition*, 2014).

The paradigm of governance set by the Constitution is critical for assessing the performance of political coalitions. It allows political forces to play their share of duty while reflecting the amount of interaction between the arms of legislative-executive authority. Under this connection, J. J. Linz identifies the characteristics of the operation of political coalitions in presidential and parliamentary governance models throughout the democratic transition process. In contrast to legislative government, the presidential

governance model, according to J. J. Linz's viewpoint, has few overwhelming incentives for coalition formation and successful functioning. In this situation, the following three motivations stand out: 1) The president's viability is not dependant on parliamentary support, and the president does not engage with political parties that are not "his"; 2) Because the president is independent from the legislative body and chosen through national elections, he overestimates his capacity to manage himself; 3) the presidential model of governance implies the premise of "winner gets all," which discourages collaboration or coalition building (Linz & Valenzuela, 1994). Based on these three motivations, the function and value of coalitions created under presidential administration models in terms of maintaining the optimality of public policy are heavily debated.

In 2017, the Republican Party of Armenia and the ARF signed the *fifth coalition* agreement, which was the shortest collaboration agreement signed in Armenia up to that moment in terms of the total number of political procedures. The ARF announced its withdrawal from the power coalition on April 28, 2018, citing internal political conflicts and stated its priorities such as resolving the political crisis, setting clear policies, and conducting genuinely democratic snap parliamentary elections (*This can't continue that long: the ARF leaves the coalition*, 2018).

After being elected Prime Minister on May 8, 2018, a member of the board of the "Civil Contract" party and a co-founder of the "Yelk" alliance, as well as the leader of the "Velvet Revolution", N. Pashinyan formed a temporary government together with his partners of the mentioned alliance before the extraordinary parliamentary elections were held. With the participation of "Republic" and "Bright Armenia" parties. However this government has not overcome the harsh disagreements between the parties that arose as a result of the revolutionary internal political processes of 2018. In addition, the government was formed not under a coalition memorandum or agreement, but under the inertia of the existence of the "Yelk", before the 2018 snap parliamentary elections.

Snap parliamentary elections were held on December 9, 2018, in which the Republican Party did not participate, and the Bright Armenia party participated as a separate political force, having

received 18 mandates in parliament. The Civil Contract party took part in the elections in the My Step alliance, among which also the Mission party and representatives of civil society.

In reality, as expected, post-revolutionary Armenia saw a major political realignment in 2018. In other words, a memorandum "On conducting snap parliamentary elections RA in December 2018 (*A memorandum on conducting snap parliamentary elections Armenian in December 2018*, 2018)" was signed between RA Prime Minister N. Pashinyan and G. Tsarukyan, president of the National Assembly "Tsarukyan Alliance". Of course, we can't call this a coalition pact.

Summing up the experience of the formation and operation of party coalitions in the process of democratic transition in RA, we can conclude that 1) from 2003 to the present, both legislative and executive authorities have manipulated control of public objectives while concluding the political pact as an institutional tool for consolidating public interests. It was transferred to the realm of "behind the scenes" and informal connections, and 2) by expanding the institutionalization of the agreement as a consolidation of public interests, Armenia's political problems generated a persistent danger of revolutionizing the marginalized groups.

This conclusion allows us to justify the approach taken during the democratic transition process, namely that coalition formation in the post-Soviet space does not imply political responsibility, but rather the consolidation of political figures seeking power and the formation of "minimum-winning" coalitions (Melville, 2020). Furthermore, "minimum-winning" coalitions are extremely vulnerable when it comes to preserving the democratic character of public policy and decreasing marginality (Margaryan, 2019, pp. 110-111). At the same time, we believe it is important to emphasize that the formal character of programmatic and ideological arguments, as a result of a lack of genuine communication between diverse segments of the political elite, is one of the reasons for the pact's ineffectiveness.

Outlining the failed experience and ineffective activity of the political coalitions formed in RA, we believe that coalition memoranda should be concluded not only to overcome possible political development crises in current realities, but also to ensure the stability of the party system

and the consensus of civil and cooperative cultures in the future.

Civil and cooperative cultures developed by parliamentary and extra-parliamentary forces around a common public and political agenda under democratic regimes sustain the political system's cycle of "entrances" and "exits," legitimizing the space where the political elite functions. The cycle of "inputs" and "outputs" of the political system is guaranteed in developed democratic nations by active collaboration between political parties and civil society organisations. The quality of the latter's interaction influences the political system's stability. According to research, in the context of post-Soviet socio-political transformations, the neglect of "structuralist" factors and the overestimation of "exogenous quasi-standards" have resulted in 1) the formation of a low level of institutionalization of party systems and 2) electoral variability, that is, changes in the electorate's behavioral patterns in the period between electoral processes (Melville, 2020). These issues of normal modernization of the party system throughout the democratic transition are elements that have a direct influence on the quality of democracy and the political system's stability. As a result, the party system's institutionalization is impacted by the consistency of electoral democracies, political competition and representation, as well as the legitimacy of electoral processes and the organizational status of parties determined by the specific details of a region's cultural development.

R. Rose and W. Mishler (2010) developed an interactive model of party system institutionalization in the context of comparative analyses of party systems in contemporary democracies, wherein the political elites determine the rules for electoral process organization and also decide which parties shall participate in elections. The voters determine the destiny of the political elites. This level is based on the supply-side concept. Following the presentation of election results, people abandon unpopular parties in favor of those that consolidate the voters' demands. The demand-side model is represented at this level.

However, when marginal individuals or groups striving to join the elite frequently alter, leaving a party and/or forming new ones, electoral instabilities are caused as a result.

The latter is due to a lack of programma-

tic/ideological discourse among political parties or a low degree of development, which pushes the electorate's identification with the system's parties to the margins.

The efficiency of the institutionalization of the RA party system, in our opinion, is conditioned by the formal exercise of political rights and freedoms (guaranteed by the RA Constitution) by the Armenian society. A key factor is the breakdown of constitutional, legal and legislative norms regulating the activities of parties. Overcoming the aforementioned occurrences in RA is only achievable with the advancement of civil culture. In this context, civic culture can assist to build a more realistic picture of the changes implemented by political authorities throughout the democratic transition process, as well as citizens' political behavior and motivations. G. Almond and S. Verba (1989), American political scientists, described civic culture as a synthesis of political culture in which individuals' conscious engagement is fundamental. According to the authors' concept, a person who carries civic culture is a potentially engaged citizen rather than a consistently active citizen. This formula underpins one of the most significant processes of civic culture, which leads to the true participatory activity of democratic institutions in society, rather than just declarative ones. The mechanism's rationale is as follows if there are continual changes in the country's socio-political life based on public interest, then a person with civic culture is politically inactive, and this passivity helps the ruling class to accomplish its role. However, when large-scale conflict-related public political and economic problems emerge in the country and there is a public desire for a solution, a person with a civil culture gets active. Furthermore, persons with political subjectivity may successfully express their interests and desires by engaging in a variety of civic groups and networks. At the same time, the governing class with a civic culture promotes people's political subjectivity and considers public opinion while making political choices. The efficacy of changes in public awareness is shown as a phenomena supporting a person's socialization process with the support of civic culture. In this context, civic culture gives a chance to develop a more realistic knowledge of the changes implemented by political authorities throughout the democratic transition process, as well as people's

political behavior and underlying reasons. Besides, it is feasible to improve control over the activities of the parties within the framework of civil culture. In this context, we believe it is vital to analyze new methods to party activity, their role, and relevance. According to democratic transition theorists (Diamond et al., 1997), the representational, communicative functions, and the deliberate expansion of the public agenda developed on the basis of input from society assure the efficacy of the parties in that multidimensional process. The significance of these tasks is underlined not only in the publications of political scientists researching the democratic transition, but also in the laws and legal acts that provide the constitutional and legal framework within which the parties operate. The international legislative framework for the protection of the rights of political parties is based, first of all, on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (*The universal declaration on human rights*, 10 December, 1948), as well as in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (*International covenant on civil and political rights*, adopted on 16 December 1966 and entered into force on 23 March 1976) and the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (*The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, signed on 4 November 1950, Rome. Signed by RA on 25 January 2001, ratified on 26 April 2002, entered into force on 26 April 2002) reserved for the freedoms of self-expression and self-realization, the formation of “package” alliances of ideologically diverse parties, and the organization of peaceful assemblies.

The constitutional and legal framework for controlling the activity of political parties is critical for the rule of law because it provides the required foundation for political socialization and civic education. In reality, in societies undergoing democratic transition, if political parties do not evolve in response to current difficulties and, as a result, do not socialize their voters, these societies become marginal and no longer evaluate the need to address numerous challenges. As a result, the knowledge of the need for long-term socialization and the natural process of modernization is first automatically denied, and society’s mobility steadily diminishes. This generates favorable conditions for certain marginal sections of society to “swing,” while others are alienated

exercising their right to participate in decision-making.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the efficacy of political party operations is governed by each society’s political traditions, culture, historical memory, as well as its political and legal consciousness. Thus, the procedure for the creation and functioning of political parties in the Republic of Armenia is outlined by the Republic of Armenia’s Constitution and the RA Law on Parties. Despite the fact that the RA Constitutional Law “On Parties” issued in 2016 has experienced significant modifications since the previous one (2002), it still needs revision in terms of text and implementation. It is true that the existence of many parties does not signal the emergence of a multi-party system or ideological diversity. Only 10 of Armenia’s more than eighty legally recognized parties or party coalitions participate in the electoral procedures. Thus, five parties took part in the 2017 parliamentary elections (Republican Party of Armenia, Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Free Democrats, Armenian Renaissance, Communist Party of Armenia) and four party alliances (“Yelk”, “Ohanyan-Raffi-Oskanian”, “Tsarukyan”, “Armenian National Congress-Armenian People’s Party”), and in the 2018 early parliamentary elections-nine parties (“National Progress”, “Prosperous Armenia”, “Bright Armenia”, “Armenian Revolutionary Federation”, “Republican Party of Armenia”, “Sasna Tsrer”, “Citizen’s Decision”, “Christian-Folk Revival”, “Rule of Law”) and the bipartisan bloc (“My step”, “We”).

A remarkable circumstance characteristic of the Armenian political culture is also the fact that extra-parliamentary parties are active only 5-6 months before the election processes. In terms of the activity of the parties, the situation is relatively unsettled in the run-up to the elections. The required elements for the registration of parties are stated in Article 9 of the present Law of the Republic of Armenia on Parties. However, they are insufficient in terms of public oversight of their future operations. Following the conclusion of the electoral process, the majority of registered parties in Yerevan and the Republic of Armenia’s territory suspend operations. Furthermore, their offices are closed, and all contact information (official website, Facebook page, phone numbers) is no longer functional.

According to Article 32 of the RA Law “On Parties,” a party’s activity may be suspended if it “in the course of its activities committed a gross violation of the law” or “did not participate in the elections to the National Assembly or the Council of Elders of the cities of Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor twice in a row independently or as part of a party bloc or as part of the list of another party”. Part 2 of the same article defines a gross violation of the law as “violation by the party of the procedure established by law for the disposition of donations, publication of the party’s annual reports or provision of documents established by law, and within thirty days after being brought to responsibility in accordance with the procedure provided for by the RA Code of Administrative Offenses, not eliminating the violation or allowing such violation of the law”.

It is also crucial to assess the criteria for suspending the activity of parties in line with the legal procedure from the standpoint of the content put forth in a certain period. Thus, the provision established by law that “did not participate in the elections to the National Assembly or the Council of Elders of the cities of Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor twice in a row” is insufficient, because participation twice in a row is not a sufficient condition for assessing the ideological activity of the party. In reality, enshrining such misleading language in the legislation leads to numeric expansion of parties but never to competition in the party system for pluralism, ideas, programs, and concepts. The relevant provision of the RA Law on Parties should explicitly clarify the mechanism for suspending parties based on qualitative measures of party activity between election cycles.

The condition of participation in elections to the National Assembly or the Council of Elders of the cities of Yerevan, Gyumri, and Vanadzor twice in a row should be reformulated in paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Article 32 of the RA Law “On Parties,” excluding the possibility of suspending parties on the list of party coalitions or another party. The efficiency of the party as a separate political entity should be examined in the management of the results acquired during the past two national elections as well as in the adjustment period in the process of developing the party system. The suggested legal modifications are important for the growth of the party system as well as the successful operation of the coming

coalition government. Simultaneously, the process of decreasing the number of parties within the scope of the proposed reforms, generates a genuine ideological and programmatic competition between them, contributing to the elimination of marginality.

To summarize, constitutional and legal restrictions on party activity are insufficient for the growth of the party system and the establishment of efficient coalitions. The degree of ideological involvement of the country’s parties in the democratic process, as well as the level of development of civil culture, are crucial in this context. In this regard, we believe it is necessary to specify legislatively the requirements and level of responsibility for their ideological and representational actions in order for the parties to grow as a vital institution of the RA political system. In other words, parties should not only compete for power, but also conduct civic education and constantly socialize their members, making them active participants in the decision-making, implementation, control, and result management processes.

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