Political Consensus: A crucial and key element of political organization

MSc. Sali Shehu, PhD Candidate
Faculty of Law, University of Tirana, Tirana, Albania

Abstract

The following material will focus initially on determining the concept of consensus, as defined by different scholars and different philosophical beliefs, role played by consensus in the establishment and functioning of the rule of law, in operation of international organizations, such as the UN, NATO and the EU. Also, we will discuss briefly the role of consensus in the process of running and organization of these organizations and functioning of the structures of national security in the process of making important decisions, in achieving the standards for Euro-Atlantic integration, and in the closing of this paper we will provide some conclusions which might be of some help in contributing, even theoretically, in the establishment, consolidation and strengthening of the national security structure. Finally, the conclusion part of this paper is thought to offer some recommendations, as well. Of course, due to the scope of this paper, the recommendations are being addressed to the political class, as an attempt to encourage it to use consensus in all areas of its activity.

Keywords: political consensus; decision making; political framework; international organizations

Introduction

Through focusing mainly on theoretical researchers, the core objective of this paper is consensus, as a philosophical – political concept, in the first first view, gives the belief that: first of all, this important element of cooperation is a political instrument of political decision-making bodies which, in the use of wisdom and calmness, will reach important objectives and goals in favor of the country's future.

The role plaid by consensus in the process of state establishment and functioning

A typical example of analyzing the consensus from the point of view of its historically contribution in the constitution of the state, is the case of establishment and constitution of the government in United States of America. Right after having won the independence after the Revolutionary War (1775-1783), American countries were faced with the problem of establishing a government in time of peace, which would guarantee the best security for the future. States should establish the rule of law and order, should collect taxes, pay large debts and organize the legal basis for trade

between them. They must deal also with Indian tribes and enter into negotiations with other governments, as well.

The great leaders, like George Washington and Alexander Hamilton, began to consider the possibility of establishing a strong national government out of a new constitution. Hamilton contributed by organizing a National Assembly, which was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1787, for the purpose of revising the first draft of the founders of the state. In that case, the majority of delegates in the Assembly, decided to design a new program for governing the country, decided about the Constitution of the United States. The new constitution did not only create a union of states, but gave birth to a government that exercised its authority directly over all citizens. Also, the constitution clearly defined the power of the national government. Furthermore, it clearly defined the obligation to protect the rights of states and individuals.

The task for the creation of a new government was not an easy task. There were times when the Parliament was threatened to fail because of the controversies between the delegates. For example, there were cases of disagreement between the delegates of large and small countries concerning the number of representatives in the national legislature. Large states were in favor of the Virginia Plan, under which the number of representatives was determined by population size and smaller states supported the New Jersey Plan, under which all countries should have the same number of representatives. Delegates of the State of Connecticut offered a solution resolved the disagreement. Their plan offered that the number of representatives in the Senate to be equal for all states, while the number of representatives in the House of Representatives be determined in proportion to the population. This proposal became known as "Compromise of Connecticut" or the "Great Compromise"[1]. States which ratified the Constitution, after electing their political representatives, on February 4 elected George Washington as the first President of the United States.

The first Congress after the constitution was held on March 4 in New York. It was held in order respond to the different needs of the United States. Over the years, the Constitution has been perfected further. Madison James stated that: "If we want to build a system to be coherent in the future centuries, we should not forget the changes that these centuries will bring". Because of the consensus in the drafting of the constitution, although it should answer the demands of an American society that was continuously developing, the constitution has been updated often. However, the core content and the text of the constitution have not been changed. Individuals of every generation have respected it in the most appropriate manners. Willem E. Glledsteun, a British statesman, has described the constitution of the United States of America, as a result and as the product of a wide compromise of all the actors, as the Par Excellence work ever created by the human mind and determination.

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[1] Michael Burgan, *Henry Clay: the Great Compromiser*, The Child's World, Washington, 2004.

What is the consensus?

Max Weber defines consensus as something that exists when our expectations regarding the behavior of others are realistic[2]. This is because; others will usually accept these as valid predictions for themselves without any explicit agreement. In the analysis of postwar policy in Britain and other Western countries, the word "consensus" was used to denote a kind of agreement between the political parties about procedures or constitutional rules. But, there have been cases of application of the consensus in the arena of political objectives, such as: the running of national health system, social welfare and the application of Keynesian methods of administration for ensuring full employment.

Kavanagh define consensus in the meaning in which it was applied in British politics after the war, that is, a set of parameters that define a "range of policy options that politicians and state officials value as administratively practicable, economically feasible and politically acceptable"[3]. At that time the conflict between the parties was limited to a few issues with symbolic value, but emotionally filled up, such as nationalization. Such a general public agreement about the objectives made that many areas of policy were valued simply as technical issues: small adjustments of the policy in force, adding in this way the possibilities of intervention from various interest groups in exercising their influence to achieve the generally acceptable goals.

Teams of political and strategic decision making bodies should work in consensus in solving critical issues. Some of the critical tasks that require consensus are: Strategic assessment of the situation; Identification of the key political issues; Expression of policy objectives; Establishment of a strategy; Execution (Implementation) of the strategy.

The main goal of a strategic team is to take decisions that reflect the best thinking of its members or, in other words, to "forge" the consensus of the members. We can be easily confused about what we mean with the term 'consensus' and what we can define as such. Below are provided some cases:

- Consensus is the process and the output of this process. Consensus is the process where everyone has the freedom of expressing his argument. Opposing views are being addressed and resolved by the team. A satisfactory level of unified individuals starts to appear during the process of reaching a general agreement.
- The consensus is an agreement, but not necessarily a full agreement. It is an outcome or a result that is very close "to being acceptable". All, or most of the team members, or the group members, of a political party or a community may be in favor of it, and just a few or no one of the team members disfavors it

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[2] Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. Weber: *Political Writings*.

[3] Kavanagh Dennis, *Oxford dictionary of Political Biography*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998.

completely. Usually, when a team reaches general agreement, not everyone is fully happy, but everyone accepts the current point of view of the group.

- Consensus is not authoritarian, perfect, conformist or weak.

- Consensus is not a decision imposed by the team leader where team members obey to it as it may happen in a situation of ordering. Hierarchical decisions do not reflect the opinion of the group. Usually, hierarchical decisions do not reflect the alternative to which all members agree with as the best one and everyone supports it.

- Consensus is not a perfect team agreement that gives the core priorities of each member. It does not mean that everyone will be satisfied by consensus, but it is important being a product of the willingness for cooperation.

- Consensus is not a unanimous decision. This means that it empowers each team member with the power to "veto".

- Consensus is not a voting of the majority. This is no effective consensus, for the majority is pleased with it. The minority is forced to agree on a decision that it does not support, which in itself reflects what the consensus is not.

- Consensus is not "group thinking", neither is it the willingness of cohesive teams for confirming and taking narrow-minded decisions unrelated to critical evaluation, to different opinions or arguments.

- Consensus is not something vague, a proposal without substance, which simply does not present any risk. Effective consensus may be placed anywhere on a continuum scale between perfect agreement and not unanimous approval. Poor strategic decisions fall towards the end limits of this continuum scale[4].

- Some teams "drown" or are blocked, trying to reach a perfect consensus, giving each member substantially veto power over any discussion, wasting time and causing harmful conflicts among the members. In many cases, the teams within the government find themselves at the other extreme point – their demand for consensus produces a lukewarm condition, worthless initiatives (without pragmatic consistency) that have little influence on strategic issues.

- A consensual decision is one which all team members support. Such a decision may be, but not necessarily, the preferred option of all members. When a true consensus is being reached through a process in which every member of the team participates, usually the outcome is decision of high quality. Moreover, it is a decision that has a wide acceptance and support for implementation. And most

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[4] Priemus Hugo etc,. *Decision-Making on mega projects: Cost-Benefit Analysis, planning innovation*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, 2008.

importantly, team members are motivated to value and appraise the decision through its implementation[5].

Consensus in Strategic Decision Making

The decision making at the strategic levels depends highly on the ability of teams to reach consensus for actions. No team can succeed, despite its power to support policy decisions through bureaucratic manners, in resisting the conflict with groups of interest, media's criticism and decision implementation. Acts of consensus are the "oxygen" of decision-making process in the system of national security or, even the private sector, which should support decision-making through the implementation of state procedures and the free market.

Political framework

This framework highlights the importance of how forms of consensus can be translated into a wide vision for change, as well as common points achieved through understanding and negotiations. Political framework suggests a three-step strategy for political action:

- Determining the agenda for change;
- Creation of networks and coalitions;
- Organization of agreements and negotiations.

An effective leader should build an agenda that has a vision about what can be and what should be the long-term interests of the parties involved. Furthermore, the leader must have a strategy that takes into account the relevant organizational and environmental forces in order to build a network that makes sure that the goals will be achieved. What is more important, it is the fact that the team leader should negotiate the changes, based on overall agreed vision for the future.

Creation of the model

The consensus model of decision-making in a team points out the factors which clearly distinguish highly effective teams from those of low productivity:

- High conceptual level;
- Rigorous method of consensus;
- Careful management of the decision.

The model of consensus about the decision-making in a team portrays and describes a way of thinking as a team of high performance capability. In the three main pillars of

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[5] Adams Katherine and Galanes Gloria, *Communicating in Groups: Applications and skills*, McGraw-Hill Education, Pennsylvania, 2011.

consensus are found 14 key factors for success, which lead towards taking a decision as a team. However, consensus not always is present, as it can be showed in the following case through the example of a personal experience of former US Secretary, Colin Powell.

> I was surprised to know that some of the important discussions were carried without any prior preparation or planning. The debate in the Oval Office was a very volatile "business" (wearing many unexpected situations and issues), and the one that was performing better at this "sport" was the president's chief of staff, John Sununu. He used to interrupt the speakers right in the middle of their speech, for continuing with his favorite subject, a gesture that seemed not to bother the president at all. Bush listened, spoke little..., restated that the planners should express a clear intention for restoring democracy... and after this the meeting was dismissed (Colin Powell, 2005)[6].

The teams of strategic decision making should operate in the right conceptual level. This clearly means operating in a multi reference frame, not being involved by bad influences and negative biases. They seek consensus among themselves, within the organization, between stakeholders and the public. Last but not least, strategic teams avoid the consumption of resources and limitless actions, without missing out the chances and strategic opportunities. Then, we naturally ask questions such as: What is the factor for success? What are the methods that improve strategic teams? How do effective teams exercise this factor?

Based on the factors of success, we can analyze and evaluate each team, even those of low efficiency level. All teams show them in different degrees. However, the best teams standout by making serious commitments and monitoring the activities of the team from the point of view of success factors. This quality commitment differentiates and defines highly effective teams.

Consensus and the most important international organizations

One of the most important products of consensual initiatives and international political decision-making body is the United Nations Organization. Throughout the history of this organization, decisions are mainly taken by consensus; therefore it is successful by contributing significantly in the establishment and conservation of the international security. For this, the UN has established the responsible structures which have given the tone of its history in the last 5-6 decades of world history. Article 51 in the UN Charter expresses the right of individuals or group of individuals of all member states of the UN to be defended. It sanctions the measures that can be taken in the exercise of this right until the time when the Security Council has taken the necessary measures for securing global peace and security.

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[6] Powell Colin and Koltz Tony, *It worked for me: in life and Leadership*, Harper, New York, 2012.

From the year of 1945 until 1949, facing the need for economic reconstruction, Western European countries and their allies of North America viewed the expansionist policies and methods of the USSR with great fear. In fact, between 1947 and 1949 there were a series of political events which caused the deepest crisis. These series of political events included threats to the sovereignty of Norway, Greece, Turkey and other Western Europe countries, such as the illegal blockade of Berlin etc. As a result in March 1948 it was signed the Treaty of Brussels, which decided on a common defense system of Belgium, France, Netherlands, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom.

After that negotiations between the United States and Canada followed on the creation of a single alliance in the North Atlantic, which would be based on security guarantees and mutual commitments between Europe and North America. The Powers of the Brussels Treaty invited Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Portugal to become part of this process. These negotiations culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Washington in April 1949, by creating and implementing a security system based on a partnership of these 12 countries. Later, other countries joined this Treaty as well, a process that continues still even today.

The ultimate meaning of equal security among the members of the organization, regardless of their differences and their national military capabilities, contributes to the regional stability of the participating countries and of other countries that are not members, as well. The modalities used by the Alliance in order to implement its policy of security include the maintenance of a sufficient military capability to prevent war, the capacity to manage crises that affect the security of its members, active dialogue with other nations and a cooperative approach to European security, including here measures to progress further in the sector of controlling arms and the process of disarmament.

Policy of consensus on big international organizations

Policy formulation and implementation, in an alliance of independent sovereign countries, it depends on all member governments being fully informed about general policy and goals of each other and to the basic considerations that raised them. This calls for regular political consultation, whenever possible during the processing of the policy after national decisions are taken. Political consultation in NATO began as a systematic exercise in September 1949 at the time when the Council met for the first time, shortly after the North Atlantic Treaty was enforced. The Council is the principal forum for political consultation. Discussions during its meetings are informal and direct. The Secretary General plays a key role as the principal representative and spokesman in the contacts and communication with both individual governments, as well as in concern of the public affair issues. Consultation is taking place on a regular

basis in other forums as well: the high level of the Political Committee, the Policy Coordination Group, Regional Expert Group, *Ad Hoc* Groups, etc[7].

Political consultation among the members of the Alliance is not limited to events taking place within the NATO Treaty. More often, events outside the geographical area covered by the Treaty have implications for the Alliance therefore discussions about them become part of the agenda of the Council and its subordinate committees. The consultative machinery of NATO is always available and widely used by member nations in different circumstances, even if NATO as an Alliance may not be directly involved. By consulting to each other member nations are able to pre identify areas in which security and stability is being threatened, in order to be able to take coordinated action.

Consultation within the Alliance takes many forms. In its basic level it involves simply the exchange of information and opinions. At another level it covers the communication of actions and decisions which governments have already taken or will take, and which have direct or indirect impact on the interests of their allies. It may also involve the possibility of early warning about actions and decisions to be taken by governments in the future, in order to provide opportunities that those actions or decisions to be supported by others. It may include discussion that aim to achieve a wide consensus on policies to be adopted or decisions to be taken. Lastly, it tries to make it possible for member countries to achieve mutually acceptable agreements about decisions or action taken by the Alliance as a whole.

There are regular consultations on actual political issues, which take place with Partner countries in the context of the Euro-Atlantic and with Russia, as well. The principles which guide consultations in these forums are of the type that are being believed by them and that for a long time have formed the basis for consultations within the Alliance on the basis of equality cooperation. According to Article 5 of the Treaty all member countries of NATO participate fully in the political level of cooperation within the Alliance and are equally committed to the terms of the Treaty of the North Atlantic, which means that an attack on one or more of the countries would be considered an attack against all of them.

The way in which the Alliance has evolved ensures that the differences in the requirements and policies of member countries can be taken into account concerning their positions within the Alliance. This flexibility manifests itself in a number of different ways. In some cases the differences may be simply procedural ones hence they can be accommodated without any difficulty. Take for example Iceland, which owns no military forces therefore if it wishes it can be represented in military forums by a civilian. In other cases the differences may be of a more substantive nature. France, a founding

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[7] http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49178.htm

member of the Alliance in 1949, withdrew from the integrated military structure of the Alliance in 1966, while remaining a full member of its political structures. Differences between member countries of NATO can be of their geographical, political, military, and constitutional nature. For example, the participation of Norway and Denmark in NATO's military dispositions must comply with national legislation which does not allow nuclear weapons or foreign forces to be stationed on their national territory during times of peace.

Unlike NATO, the European Union was founded on the basis of the Treaty of Rome signed on 25 March 1957 by Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. In 1973 they were joined by Denmark Ireland and the United Kingdom; 1981 Greece; 1986 Portugal and Spain; 1995 Austria, Finland and Sweden, and finally in May 1, 2004 they were joined by 10 more countries, mainly from the former Eastern European countries, turning this region into the world's most powerful commercial region. In the Council of Maastricht, which was held in year 1991, the Heads of States adopted two Unions; a Political Union and an Economic and Monetary Union, which together formed the Treaty of European Union. The Treaty entered into force after ratification by all parties in November 1, 1993.

Conditional use of limited voting rights is being elaborated and discussed further in the context of foreign policy and security. Under the new structure of the Treaty, the European Council is deciding on common strategies. The European Council implements the decisions by undertaking joint actions and adopting common provisions. These decisions are taken by qualified majority, but include provision for a member state to take a position of "constructive abstention". This would indicate that the member state taking this position chooses not to participate in the voting process, but does not impede action by the other member states.

Conclusions

The conclusion part of this paper is thought to offer some recommendations, as well. Of course, due to the scope of this paper, the recommendations are being addressed to the political class, as an attempt to encourage it to use consensus in all areas of its activity. Despite the fact that consensus is a very difficult concept to be implemented in practice, especially in complex and complicated political environment of Albania, I hope that the language of consensus will prevail in politics minimally when decision concerning security, foreign policy or other important interests for the country are being taken.

- Consensus is the headline in all meetings of the representatives of international institutions and political leaders of the country. Hence, it remains a permanent task for all political actors in the country to develop it further, especially when important security issues and the future of the country are concerned.

- Lack of consensus on important issues is one of the reasons for this long transition period experienced in Albania. Reaching consensus from political actors for important issues shows political maturity and existence of democracy.

- Consensus is the most important solution for political decisions and for the development of the country towards integration.

- Decisions taken by consensus are more widely accepted decisions with broader support and easily enforceable.

- The national security structures ensure more security inside the country and abroad, as well, especially when they are taken by a wide consensus.

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