

Defence Reform and Democratisation

Djordje Popovic

Insufficiently reformed security sector can be the cause of the delayed consolidation of democracy in a post-authoritarian or a post-conflict society. Consolidation of democracy is by all means the ultimate goal of the democratisation process. This goal will not be achieved as long as democracy does not become “the only game in town”.¹ Therefore, it is necessary to examine the relation between security sector reform and the consolidation of democracy. The question that imposes itself is – In what way the security sector reform influences the consolidation of democracy in a transforming society.

Democratisation as a process, at its starting level consists of abolishment or overcoming the previous authoritarian regime, establishment of a democratic system and its consolidation.² However, experiences and theory findings warn us that one of the preconditions for establishment of a free and democratic society, especially after transition from nondemocratic system of power, is the security sector reform. Unfortunately, there is a lack of the relevant scientific considerations on the relation between security sector reform and consolidation of democracy. Only few authors tried to answer the question whether the consolidation of democracy in a society depends on the security sector reform and in what scale.

After recognition of importance of the security sector reform for the democratisation process, it is very important to establish what elements of the security sector are crucial for the consolidation of democracy. Although it is the holistic approach that is mostly used now days for determination of the elements of the security sector, in this paper the traditional determination of this sector will be used. This means that under the security sector actors as military, police, secret services and paramilitary forces are determined as main elements of the security sector.³ The reason for using this approach is the fact that security sector reform concerns the actors that provide security for the state, in an efficient and effective manner under the democratic civilian control.⁴ Defence system is the biggest and often the most

¹ Linz, Huan and Stepan, Alfred. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe*. (John Hopkin’s University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996).

² Huntington, Samuel P. *The Third Wave, Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. (University of Oklahoma Press, March 1993.)

³ Edmunds, Timothy. *Security Sector Reform: Concepts and Implementation* in: Flury, Phillip; Hadžić, Miroslav (ed.). *Sourcebook on Security Sector Reform*, (DCAF, CCVO, Belgrade, 2004.)

⁴ Ibid.

important element of the security sector that influences the process of democratisation in a transforming society.

In establishing the role of the defence reform in the democratisation process it is of great importance to consider in what way the political elites which should be the driving force of this process acted while implementing the reforms. Often there is a case that the new decision-makers perceive elements of the security sector as their clients that should be used in political fight for obtaining or preserving power. This can in many ways make the process of reform and process of democratisation more difficult. Although the order in which the reforms are being carried out in a transforming society often depends on international factors, this order is firstly dependent on the situation in the country, but also on the perception of the initiators of the democratisation process. Therefore it is very important to establish whether the political elites understand the importance of the security sector reform for the democratisation process, or they maybe have other priorities.

The initiators of the democratisation process are often people with completely different political heritage and aims.⁵ They can be in favour of democracy because they believe that democracy itself is a goal, or because they could use democracy in reaching other goals. After taking the power they often fight about the nature of the new government.⁶ Therefore, it is not a rare case that the most powerful group defines what the needed fundamental changes are.⁷

The state apparatuses of force in a nondemocratic society are usually exempted from any kind of democratic civilian control. This position in the society they will often try to preserve after the democratic changes. Some of them will succeed by creating strong ties with new political elites. Having in mind these examples, it is important to determine whether the new decision-makers have already prepared security sector reform strategies which would enable any kind of biased reform.

Defence reform is a process that requires presence of strong leadership which can create wide consensus and marginalise disturbing factors, preventing them from taking dominant

⁵ Vučetić, Srđan. *From Southern to Southeastern Europe: Any Lessons for Democratization Theory?* (Southeast European Politics, Vol. V, No. 2-3, December 2004.)

⁶ Huntington, Samuel P. *The Third Wave, Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century.* (University of Oklahoma Press, March 1993.)

⁷ Linz, Huan and Stepan, Alfred. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe.* (John Hopkin's University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996).

positions in public and political life.⁸ We can therefore conclude that the success of the defence reform often depends on its initiators.

Military will usually keep reserve power also under a new regime. The officer core as a whole usually perceives itself as a permanent part of state apparatus, which has long-term interests and constant functions which overcome the interests of current governments. Military leadership, more than any other state structure, is capable of imposing reserved domains to the newly-elected government, and that by definition prevents consolidation of democracy. This is especially acute problem if the military as a part of the state apparatus took part in wide violations of human rights and if the absence of any kind of punishment is the condition of its loyalty to the new government.⁹

Another important factor that influences the democratisation process is the nature of the previous nondemocratic regime. The characteristics of that regime have many implications on the ways of transition and tasks that different countries are facing when they start their fight for consolidation of democracy.¹⁰ That is why the transfer of power between old and new regime is important for further democratisation process. Peaceful transfer of power makes the consolidation of democracy much easier. In order to make this transfer peaceful the initiators of the democratisation process often make pacts with members of the old regime, or even more often with members of the security forces. Unfortunately, making pacts is not the necessary condition of peaceful transfer of power. Pacts created that way can be democratic, but also nondemocratic in their aims and consequences. Furthermore, once created it does not mean that pacts will function in practise.¹¹

Defence reform for its goal has removing the obstacles that defence system can create for consolidation of democracy. That is because the elements of this system, its actors more accurately, can have great influence on political situation in transforming societies. This is especially present in post-authoritarian societies where members of the system of defence can, out of their utilitarian reasons – protection of their partial interests and acquired power, openly or secretly interfere in the democratisation process. The possibility that new pro-democratic government tries to use the security sector, or its elements for their own purposes, should not

⁸ Ehrhart, Hans-Georg; Schnabel, Albrecht; Blagescu, Monika. *Towards More Effective Assistance in Security Sector Reform*. (Policy Brief, Based on the IFSH/United Nations University Project "The Role of the Military in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding".)

⁹ Linz, Huan and Stepan, Alfred. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe*. (John Hopkin's University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

be excluded either. Therefore it is very clear why Timothy Edmunds claims that security sector reform is a key component of any democratisation process.¹²

At the end it must be observed that the list of difficulties and obstacles, as well as the achievements of this reform can be used as an important indicator of the direction and success of the democratisation process of a society.¹³ Especially because of the fact that the security sector reform for one of its goals has creation of the legal framework for subordination of the security elements – state apparatuses of force, to the legitimate political power. Establishment of this legal framework, which guarantees civilian supremacy, can be seen as a starting point for a successful democratisation process in a transforming society. This framework is, among other, based on two main principles – accountability and transparency. Therefore the relations between the government and security elements should be based on these two principles too.

¹² Edmunds Timothy. *Security Sector Reform* in: Flury Phillip, Hadžić Miroslav (ed.). *Sourcebook on Security Sector Reform*. (DCAF, Centar za civilno-vojne odnose, Geneva/Belgrade, 2004.)

¹³ Hadžić, Miroslav. *The Concept of Security Sector Reform* in: Flury Phillip, Hadžić Miroslav (ed.). *Sourcebook on Security Sector Reform*. (DCAF, Centar za civilno-vojne odnose, Geneva/Belgrade, 2004.)