

The Importance of EU Integration for Albania

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Abstract

Throughout its history, Albania, has felt, both in terms of geographical position and culture, being part of the Europe. Under the slogan “ We want Albania to be like the rest of Europe “, popular protests in the early 90’s revealed the century’s-old dream. The first step taken by the country in the early 90s was the establishment of diplomatic relations with the European Union, and the two parties signed in 1992 a number of agreements that included the areas of Trade and Cooperation Development. By signing them, Albania was given the opportunity to benefit from the programs that the European Union offered to third countries. After these steps, came the expansion of these relations in other areas of special interest for Albania. Albania’s main achievement was the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU, which includes the establishment of a legal framework for cooperation and the gradual adoption of European standards. The signing of the SAA in 2006, the liberalization of visas in 2010 and the membership in NATO in 2009, constitute some of the most important milestones in the context of the Albania’s integration into the European Union. The signing of the SAA marked Albania’s arrival at a closer station to the European Union, as well as the successful crowning of a multi-year effort in this direction. The NATO Summit of April 2009 officially confirmed a dream of Albanians, by granting it the NATO membership. The image of the European

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Union for Albania is multifaceted. It is conditioned by the bilateral relations and bilateral geostrategic interests, the historical legacy and the perception that the “receptors” of the EU or the representatives of its institutions in Albania or for Albania have for the country.

Key words: *EU integration, economic development, political stability, security*

I. Introduction

Albania emerged from a harsh communist system after 45 years and with the overthrow of the communist regime, it put its efforts to integrate into the European Union. While Albania was under the communist regime, the European Union began to lay its foundations. It was originally started as the European Coal and Steel Community (1951) with the Treaty of Paris and had as its founding states Belgium, France, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, and the West Germany. Over the years and Treaty after Treaty, the EU expanded, and the fall of the communist regime found it with 12 states. With the integration of Austria, Finland and Sweden in 1995, the 15 countries covered almost all of Western Europe. In this situation, all post-communist countries, and Albania among them, aimed to become part of the most powerful political and economic unit in the continent and region.

Albania's first diplomatic relations with the European Union were established in 1991, but the most important event for the country in this period was the signing of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement on May 11, 1992, which entered into force on December 1, 1992. This agreement created the opportunity for Albania to benefit grants from the program. In 1996, Albania was close to signing a new agreement with the European Union, but due to the disputed elections of May 1996, as well as the economic and social crisis caused by the collapse of pyramid firms in 1997, this was not achieved.

These events, as well as the difficult political situation in the region after the breakup of Yugoslavia, caused the European Union to adapt the *Regional Approach policy for the Balkan countries in 1996*. The Council of General Affairs, at this time, determined a series of political and economic conditions for the Balkan countries to fulfill, in order to develop and strengthen their relations with the European Union. The criteria they had to meet were related to respect for democratic principles, freedoms and human rights, building and respecting the rule of law, protection of minorities, development of the market economy, and regional cooperation. Regional cooperation is one of the most important chapters of the SAA and aims to integrate Albania as much as possible into the Balkan region and beyond. This is a process that includes all areas of cooperation, from political,



economic to institutional, social and cultural cooperation. Albania should develop regional cooperation with the countries that have signed the SAA and with the EU candidate countries. Through this cooperation, it is intended to create an area of stability and economic development in the Balkan region. A very important moment for Albania is the visa liberalization process between Albania and the countries of the Schengen area, which is a decision which come with benefits and obligations.

Albania was recognized as a ‘potential candidate country’ of the EU in 2000 and began negotiations for the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) in 2003, which was approved and signed on June 12, 2006.

Albania applied for full membership in the EU on April 28, 2009, and since 2014 has the status of an official candidate. This was followed by the European Commission’s recommendation to open negotiations with Albania in November 2016, and in June 2018, the European Council agreed to launch Albania’s integration talks at the end of 2019.

The integration of Albania is linked to that of North Macedonia. It must meet the preconditions for the integration negotiations to begin, and these preconditions are as follows: reforms in the justice system, a new electoral law, the punishment of corrupt judges and the respect for human rights of the Greek minority.

Albania’s future is in the European Union. The integration of Albania into the structures of the European Union is one of the biggest challenges for the country in recent years, and in order to become part of this superstate with full rights, Albania must fulfill a number of conditions in the economic, social and political spheres. and the rule of law.

II. EU-Albania relations, at the political level and the integration process.

II.1. EU-Albania relations at the political level

Albania has had a long and complicated relationship with the European Union (EU), with several milestones and setbacks over the years. This relationship has been marked by several milestones over the years. In 2003, Albania began the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) with the EU, which aimed to prepare the country for eventual EU membership. This involved a series of political and economic reforms, as well as negotiations on a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU. Negotiations on the SAA began in 2003 and were completed in 2006. The SAA established a framework for Albania’s relationship with the EU, including provisions on political dialogue, trade, and cooperation in areas

such as justice, freedom, and security. In 2010, Albania was granted visa-free travel for its citizens to the Schengen area, which was seen as a significant step towards EU integration. In 2014, the EU granted Albania candidate status, recognizing the progress made by the country in implementing political and economic reforms and in 2018, the EU announced that it would open accession negotiations with Albania, marking a major milestone in the country's path towards EU membership. However, the start of negotiations was postponed several times due to concerns over corruption, the rule of law, and democratic standards in Albania.

In recent years, Albania has made progress on implementing the reforms necessary for EU membership. This has included reforms in areas such as the judiciary, public administration, and the fight against corruption. However, it has also experienced setbacks in its relationship with the EU, including delays in reforms, issues with corruption and rule of law, and political instability. In 2019, the European Council postponed a decision on opening accession negotiations with Albania, which was seen as a setback for the country's EU aspirations.

For 2019, the European Commission has prepared a progress report, which summarizes the political, economic, and social situation of Albania, and how much progress the government has achieved in accelerating the fulfillment of the criteria set by the EU for the integration of the country. Some of the main points of this report are as follows:

- Albania has continued to make progress on its EU reform.
- There was a persistent polarization in the political sphere.
- The electoral reform was affected by the disengagement of the opposition parties which relinquished their mandates in parliament, didn't contest in the local elections and didn't participate in the talks about the electoral reform.
- Even though the reform of the public administration has seen some progress, more needs to be done to ensure more transparent recruitment procedures, and merit-based civil service procedures, in order to have a more efficient, professional, and depoliticized public administration.
- The progress in the justice system reform has been steadily and with good results and has contributed to the strengthening of the independence and accountability of the judiciary.
- Efforts has been made in government's efforts to fight corruption.
- Improvements of the legal framework in the areas of child's rights and domestic violence.
- Improvements of the legal framework for the protection of the right to housing of the most vulnerable members of the Roma and Egyptian communities.

- The sphere of property rights needs more effort to address its problems.
- Freedom of expression has a good overall legislative environment, but its implementation is not adequate.
- Albania is moderately prepared in developing a functioning market economy.
- Factors such as lack of productive know-how, low education levels of technology transfers hinder Albania's competitiveness and integration into international market.
- Reform of education and training sector should continue because the sector suffers from a lot of problems, particularly in the rural areas.
- A good indicator of country's progress its full alignment with all EU common foreign and security policies and declarations.
- Albania should improve its institutional capacity on border management and asylum (Albania 2019 Report, 2019, p.3-5).

II.2. *The Berlin Process*

The Berlin Process is a diplomatic initiative aimed at promoting cooperation and connectivity between the Western Balkans countries and the European Union (EU). Albania has been an active participant in the Berlin Process since its inception in 2014. Some of the keyways in which Albania has been involved are as follows:

- *Connectivity Agenda*: The Berlin Process includes a Connectivity Agenda, which aims to improve infrastructure and connectivity in the Western Balkans region. Albania has been actively involved in the implementation of the Connectivity Agenda, which includes initiatives such as improving transport links, energy connectivity, and digital infrastructure.
- *Regional Cooperation*: The Berlin Process also seeks to promote regional cooperation and reconciliation in the Western Balkans. Albania has been involved in several initiatives aimed at fostering regional dialogue and cooperation, such as the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), which aims to promote youth exchange and cooperation across the region.
- *Economic Development*: The Berlin Process also includes a focus on promoting economic development in the Western Balkans, with the aim of increasing trade and investment in the region. Albania has been involved in several economic initiatives under the Berlin Process, such as the Western Balkans Investment Framework, which provides financing for infrastructure projects in the region.
- *Political Dialogue*: The Berlin Process also provides a forum for political dialogue between Western Balkans countries and the EU. Albania has

participated in several high-level meetings under the Berlin Process, including the Western Balkans Summit and the EU-Western Balkans Summit.

In the framework of the Berlin Process a series of summits are organized: Summit of Berlin (2014), Summit of Vienna (2017), Summit of London (2018) and Summit of Trieste (2019). The main aim of these summits was to establish communication between the leaders of the Western Balkans opening thus the path for a series of regional initiatives (German Cooperation/Berlin Process, 2014).

At the Berlin Summit in 2014, the participants were Prime Ministers, Presidents, and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Western Balkan Countries. The President of the European Council, the Commissioner for Enlargement and Prime ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Austria, Croatia, Germany, Slovenia, and France were also present. Topics of discussion were regional cooperation, transport, the independence of the justice system, the fight against corruption and the professional education (German Cooperation: Berlin Process, 2014). The Summit concluded with: “Yearly Summits will provide a framework for a period of four years to achieve “additional, real” progress in economic cooperation, sustainable growth, reconciliation, bilateral issues and Germany will foster media freedom in the WB” (German Cooperation: Berlin Process, 2014).

II.2.1. Vienna Summit, 2015

The 2015 Western Balkans Summit was the second annual meeting of the heads of state and government of the Western Balkans. The Vienna Summit relied on the progress made since the Berlin Summit and sought to further develop cooperation between the countries of the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia). It addressed issues related to common challenges, migration issues, regional cooperation, religious and anti-extremism, the agenda for youth, education and science and connectivity. The following initiatives were undertaken upon its finalization:

- RYCO (Regional Youth Cooperation Office) and Solution of Bilateral Disputes
- Annual Economic Reform Programs (ERPs)
- 6 transport and 4 energy infrastructure investment projects
- 1 billion euros for connectivity projects will be made available from IPA II
- Obstacles to the Transport Community Treaty to be overcome (German Cooperation: Berlin Process, 2015)
- Enhancing regional cooperation, media freedom, job creation and solution of bilateral issues



- Agreement on establishment of the WB6 Chamber Investment Forum (Berlin Process, 2015).

II.2.2. Paris Summit, 2016

The Summit of Paris took place on 4 July 2016. Topics of discussion and negotiation were as follows (Berlin Process, 2016):

- Rule of law and anti-corruption.
- Youth.
- Environment.
- Migration and fighting terrorism Connectivity.

The EU representatives were committed to provide support for the following:

- Three new railway projects.
- The program for energy efficiency received additional funding.
- A roadmap for setting up of a regional market for electricity.
- Proposals for increasing the access for the region's youth to the Erasmus.
- Agreement on the Establishment of the RYCO.

II.2.3. Trieste Summit, 2017

The Trieste Summit took place in 2017 in Trieste, Italy. It was the fourth annual meeting in the framework of the Berlin Process. Topics of discussion were as follows:

- Connectivity agenda.
- Transport Community.
- Rule of law and fight against corruption (Civil Society Forum: regional cooperation and bilateral relations, rule of law / anti- corruption, youth cooperation).
- Regional economic integration.
- SMEs development.
- Education and science (The work of RYCO, the Young Civil Servants Scheme, Erasmus + program).

Parties took commitments for the following:

- Treaty Establishing Transport Community.
- Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area.
- Joint Declaration Against Corruption.

- Seven additional connectivity investment projects.
- A grant for co-financing and the balance loans from the EIB (European Investment Bank) and the EBRD (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development).
- Connectivity Europe Facility (CEF).
- Digital Summit to be held.
- 48 million euro to be provided for SMEs through WB EDIF.
- Western Balkans Research Foundation to be established (Berlin Process – 2017).

II.2.4. London Summit, 2018

The London Summit gathered the leaders of the Western Balkan countries and the EU partners with the aim to strengthen cooperation and security, to increase sustainable development of the economy and to encourage political cooperation. Topics of discussion were:

- Security issues.
- Regional cooperation and good unneighborly relations, missing persons, and war crimes.
- Fight against corruption.
- Digitalization – youth education.

Parties present in the summit took commitments as follows:

- Principles of regional cooperation in information-exchange for law enforcement agreed upon (Declaration).
- Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and their ammunition in the WB by 2024.
- Declarations on regional cooperation and good neighborly relations, on missing persons, and on war crimes were signed and stocktaking of progress in resolution of bilateral issues.
- Anti-corruption commitments.
- The set up of the Berlin Process Security Commitments Steering Group.
- Funds were pledged for digitalization of schools and for strengthening of democracy in the WB (Berlin Process, 2018).

In conclusion, the Berlin Process has been an important initiative in promoting regional cooperation and integration in the Western Balkans. While progress has been made, there is still a long way to go in addressing the challenges and achieving

the ultimate goal of EU accession for the Western Balkan countries. Continued political commitment, strong leadership, and sustained efforts are necessary to ensure the success of the process. And as the annual reports of EU on Albania indicate, Albania has a lot to do before achieving its integration to EU.

II.3. The Western Balkans and the politics towards EU

The EU has been supporting the Western Balkans through a range of instruments, including the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), which provides financial and technical assistance to support reforms in key areas such as the rule of law, governance, and the economy. The EU has also established a Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) with the Western Balkans, which aims to promote political dialogue and cooperation, and facilitate the integration of the region into the EU. The EU has opened accession negotiations with Montenegro and Serbia and granted candidate status to Albania and North Macedonia. The EU has also been supportive of Kosovo's European perspective and has encouraged dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia to resolve outstanding issues.

The EU's policy towards the Western Balkans has been shaped by several factors, including the region's strategic importance, the need for stability and security in the region, and the EU's commitment to the enlargement process. However, there are also significant challenges that need to be addressed, including corruption, organized crime, and the rule of law.

Albania's foreign policy towards the European Union (EU) is based on its aspiration to become a member of the bloc. Since gaining independence in 1912, Albania has undergone a series of political, economic, and social transformations. Albania officially applied for EU membership in April 2009, and since then, it has been working towards aligning its laws and policies with EU standards. Albania's foreign policy towards the EU is focused on strengthening its relations with the bloc and gaining full membership in the future. Albania has taken steps towards meeting the EU's accession criteria by implementing a series of political, economic, and institutional reforms. These reforms aim to bring Albania's legal and institutional framework in line with EU standards, improve the rule of law, fight corruption, and protect human rights. Albania has also been a participant in the EU's enlargement strategy, which aims to promote political stability, economic growth, and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans. Albania has been working with the EU on issues such as energy, transport, environment, and security, and has participated in various regional initiatives and projects.

Overall, Albania's foreign policy towards the EU is focused on strengthening its ties with the bloc and gaining full membership in the future. Albania has made progress in aligning its laws and policies with EU standards, but it still

faces challenges in areas such as the rule of law, corruption, and the protection of human rights. Europe is currently facing an unprecedented migration challenge. The Western Balkans has been and remains an important partner to address this crisis and reduce illegal migration flows in Europe. The European Union and member states have taken concrete actions to address this crisis and its consequences, especially by providing in-kind assistance and financial support to host administrations and communities and by creating stronger cooperation in the fight against human trafficking and border control.

Trade plays an important role in the EU's efforts to promote peace, stability, freedom and economic prosperity in the Western Balkans. All Western Balkan countries have the opportunity to enter the EU, however it will happen only if individual countries have met the established criteria. Progress along the European path is an objective and meritorious process, which depends on the concrete results achieved by each country.

III. Economic relations EU-Albania

Since its emergence from the turbulent post-communist transition, Albania has achieved significant progress in terms of social and economic development. At the same time, Albania had a rapid social change, including migration from rural areas to urban centers and mass emigration of all economically active people towards EU countries. Before the collapse of communist regime in late 1990, Albania had one of the most centralized and isolated regimes in the world. Not surprisingly, it was the last of the Central and Eastern European countries to overthrow the regime and start the process of political and economic reforms. Albania started its transition from a low level, as the lowest country in Europe.

The European Union's intervention in Albania was somehow delayed, if we compare it with the other post-communist countries, and at the beginning its interest was to ensure safety and security. Subsequently, Albania has been the beneficiary of EU funding programs for the Western Balkans, first through a 10-year PHARE program (1991-2001), followed by a five-year CARDS program (2001-2006) and, IPA program. The IPA program began to be implemented in January 2007 and replaced the previous programs. For the period 2007-10, Albania received 306.1 million euros, approximately the same as Bosnia and Herzegovina (333 million).

For the period 2014-2020, Albania has received around €639.5 million as assistance in the following areas: democracy & governance, rule of law and fundamental rights, environment and climate action, environment and climate action, transport, competitiveness and innovation, education, employment and social policies, agriculture and rural development, and regional and territorial

cooperation (European Commission/Albania- financial Assistance under IPA) .
The following table summarizes the areas of assistance:

No	Field	Sub-field
1	Democracy & governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strengthening democratic institutions; • reforming the civil service and public service delivery; • better economic governance; • improving public financial management; • empowering civil society (e.g., non-state, voluntary organizations).
2	Rule of law & fundamental rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • independent, efficient judiciary; • helping police fight organized crime; • tackling corruption; • respecting human rights conventions.
3	Environment & climate action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment with EU law and standards; • better treatment of waste and water; • controlling air pollution.
4	Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • better infrastructure and regional connectivity; • improved road safety; • increased interoperability (cross-border technical compatibility).
5	Competitiveness & innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting business competitiveness; • greater market integration; • improving the business environment; • developing tourism
6	Education, employment & social policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing effective vocational training; • better employment services and labor market policy; • inclusion of vulnerable people; • efficient health and social services
7	Agriculture & rural development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More competitive farming and food sector; • application of food safety standards; • better quality of life in rural areas.
8	Regional & territorial cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting regional networks, • reconciliation and good neighborly relations; encouraging sustainable local development in border areas

(Adopted by the author from European Commission/ European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR)/ Albania - financial assistance under IPA.

In terms of financial assistance in the framework of IPA and the amount received from EU in the different economic and social areas, the following tables provide a summary (European Commission/ Albania - financial assistance under IPA/Key Figures):

Albania	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Democracy and Rule of Law	68,7	61,9	32,7	19,6	64,4	29,0	61,2	342,5
Democracy and governance	64,7	48,9	10,2	19,6	10,4	16,4	38,5	208,7
Rule of Law and fundamental Rights	4,0	13,0	22,5	0,0	59,0	12,6	22,7	133,8
Competitiveness and Growth	0,0	30,0	49,7	60,6	46,2	70,0	40,5	297,0
Environment, climate change and energy								
Transport	0,0	0,0	24,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	24,0
Competitiveness, innovation, agriculture and rural development	0,0	0,0	21,7	60,6	20	40	40,5	182,8
Education, Employment and Social Policies	0,0	30,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	30,0	0,0	60,0
Total	68,7	91,9	82,4	80,2	115,6	99,0	101,7	639,5

However, the relationship has not always been ‘smooth’. According to Bieber the EU’s approach to the region has been characterized by a tension between stabilization and integration, with a focus on stabilizing the region through political and economic reforms in the short term, and the prospect of eventual EU membership in the long term. According to him, the challenges that the Western Balkans face in terms of meeting the EU’s membership criteria fall particularly in areas such as the rule of law, governance, and the fight against corruption. The progress in these areas has been uneven across the region, and there are significant differences between the Western Balkan countries in terms of their readiness for EU membership. There is a growing sense of “enlargement fatigue” among some EU member states, who are reluctant to support further enlargement in the absence of significant progress in the Western Balkans (Devrim & Schultz, 2009). In response to these challenges, Fischer has called for a more strategic and flexible approach to EU enlargement, one that considers the specific needs and circumstances of each Western Balkan country. She has argued that the EU should focus on supporting reforms in key areas such as the rule of law, economic governance, and human rights, and should be willing to offer concrete benefits to those countries that make progress in these areas.

In the case of Albania, the situation has been worsened by the negative perception of Albania within the European Union, as it has been perceived as a country of violent crime, mafia, blood feuds and corruption, with criminals throughout Europe.

The EU is a highly institutionalized, regional, and open actor (in the sense of pursuing relations with non-members), in addition to being a large and rich market and a source of aid, investment and technology. Following the example of Central and Eastern European countries, Albania always saw the immense importance of the EU integration as a strategy for improving its performance the region and in the economic and political sphere. This has been a consistent strategy since 1992, with the collapse of the communist regime.

The EU has operated as a state within Albania in order to oversee from inside the progress of the country. EU assistance to Albania, the application for membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) also formed part of the cooperative relationship. The EU sees the Balkan states as part of its wider region with trade concessions and agreements to be negotiated along EU formulas. Trade cooperation between Albania and the EU has formed the basis of their formal relationship and will continue to dominate their partnership. (*European Commission, Albania, 2000*)

IV. EU Integration and Security Dimension in Albania

IV.1 NATO and Albania

In the early 90s, Albania was very lucky to have on its doorstep the best models of security architecture in the history of mankind, NATO, and the European Union. Both institutions have proven to be useful in times of war and peace. The intervention of NATO, especially by the US, and later the involvement of the EU in a decisive way, saved the Balkans from becoming the Middle East of Europe.

After going through a period of deep transformation after the end of the Cold War, Albania has made rapid progress towards EU. She attaches great importance to her participation in the Partnership for Peace and has been at the helm of the program since its inception. At the same time, the country is making great efforts in developing its democratic institutions and free market economy, which is necessary to prepare for its goal of eventual membership in EU Security institutions (NATO Review, 2016).

The launch of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative at the Brussels Summit in January 1994 not only offered Albania the opportunity to strengthen its relations with NATO, but also served as a key element of the country's final integration process into NATO. The full potential of the PfP for Albania is mainly based on the implementation of the Defense Planning and Review Process (PARP), in which Albania participated. One of the most important achievements in Albania's relations with NATO in the framework of PfP has been the development of cooperative military ties for planning, training, and joint exercises, with the aim

of strengthening the ability of Albania's armed forces to undertake missions in the field peacekeeping, search and rescue, humanitarian, and other such operations. Participating in joint exercises familiarizes the Albanian military with NATO's operational planning procedures and improves its ability to work alongside friendly forces in actual missions.

Today, Albania celebrates the 10th anniversary of joining NATO, and rightfully Albania should feel proud of the great work that has done to be a member of the largest military alliance in history (USA Dept of Defense, 2019).

IV.2 EU Integration: Europeanization and Democratization

The prevailing political doctrine seems to be that the integration of the Western Balkans within the EU and NATO can help achieve stability in the Western Balkans. It helps to build a security community in the Balkans. However, these two objectives face obstacles at both regional and national levels. Regarding democratization, the main reforms that address constitutional, electoral and judicial issues are stuck. This partly explains why the implementation of European norms is difficult. Sometimes this results in divergent interpretations. Moreover, no enforcement measures are planned, while other important norms remain ignored. Thus, on the one hand at the national level, the difficulties related to the democratization process result from the divergent attitudes of the elites. On the other hand, the EU seems to give more priority to stability and security issues than to those democratic (Bogdani, & Loughlin, 2007: 289).

The integration of the Western Balkans into the EU is an important political and strategic issue. In addition, it is more than ever a European issue of concern. Thus, security, the process of integration and democratization are connected and depend on each other. However, regardless of the stated goals, Europeanization does not necessarily include democratization, although measures to consolidate democracy, strengthen the rule of law are the essence of this process. However, the evolution of Albania is quite different from other countries in the region. Indeed, the process of democratization in Albania is one of the most difficult, given its troubled historical legacy, its difficult economic situation and above all, given its extreme internal political polarization (Institute for Security Studies. The Western Balkans and the EU).

The process of democratization and Europeanization in Albania does not always coincide. Also, local, and international actors do not share the same role in the democratization process. Indeed, democratization began before Europeanization. Europeanization without democratization would be an empty shell, democracy and the rule of law are the core values of the EU.



Albania has strengths that it must rely on more in order to move forward. It is a young, dynamic country, where there is religious harmony which can also serve as an example for other countries. Its geostrategic position and its important role in regional cooperation, also confirmed by the EU, should enable Albania to move forward on its path to integration. The conditionality policy followed by the EU has greatly influenced and continues to influence the democratization of the country that began after the fall of communism.

V. Conclusions

There are several potential benefits for Albania to integrate into the European Union (EU). Economic Development is one of them. Albania's integration into the EU would provide access to a larger market and increased investment opportunities. This could lead to economic growth and job creation, as well as increased foreign direct investment. Trade and investment is another important benefit. Albania's integration into the EU would mean the elimination of tariffs and other trade barriers, which would increase trade and investment flows between Albania and other EU member states. Foreign Aid will also increase as Albania would be eligible for greater amounts of foreign aid from the EU and other international organizations, which could be used to fund development projects and infrastructure improvements. Infrastructure will also benefit. Albania's integration into the EU would require the country to meet EU standards in areas such as transportation, telecommunications, and energy infrastructure. This would lead to improved infrastructure and increased connectivity with the rest of Europe.

Political stability is another added value of Albania EU membership. EU membership would require Albania to adopt EU norms and standards on issues such as human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. This could lead to increased political stability and the strengthening of democratic institutions in Albania. Finally, security will increase. Albania's integration into the EU would also provide greater security, as it would allow Albania to participate in EU security and defense cooperation initiatives, and benefit from EU law enforcement cooperation.

Overall, Albania's integration into the EU could provide significant benefits in terms of economic development, trade, investment, foreign aid, infrastructure, political stability, and security. However, it would also require Albania to meet EU standards and regulations, which could pose challenges and require significant reforms in many areas.

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