



EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND NATIONAL SECURITY

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European Integration and National Security

Prof. Dr. Xhezair Zaganjori

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Jus & Justicia No. 15, Issue 1 is mainly dedicated to the students of the European University of Tirana (EUT), graduated in Master of Science at the Faculty of Law, Political Sciences and International Relations. The aim is to increase EUT students' participation in research activities. Best theses, articles and research papers, in cooperation with their supervisors, are selected and revised,

In this issue we embark on an exploration of the post-1990 era in the Western Balkans—a period marked by significant socio-political upheavals, transformative initiatives, and evolving regional identities. Particularly with a focus on Albania and Kosovo, this collection highlights the complex details that have shaped the region's trajectory. Naime Ibrahimini comes with the article “National Identity of Kosovo” in which she explores the narrative of Kosovo as one intertwined with a fervent quest for identity and recognition. Through this analyse, we journey into the historical, cultural, and political framework of Kosovo, assessing the markers of its national identity and the challenges and opportunities it embodies in the contemporary age. The second article “Implications of organized crime in the national security of the Western Balkans after the 1990s” by Edmond Merdani, focuses on organized crime as a long-entangled phenomenon in the socio-political landscape of the Balkans. Centring on Albania, this article sheds light on the vast reaches of organized crime networks and their implications on national security, governance, and socio-political stability. The article “Erasmus Programme, as an instrument of EU Public Diplomacy” by Blendi Lami and Rexhina Myrta, refers to the transformative Erasmus Programme. Beyond a mere academic exchange, this article posits Erasmus as a strategic instrument of EU public diplomacy, evaluating its influence in shaping perceptions, fostering European unity, and facilitating cross-cultural understanding. In his article “Security challenges in Albania after the

1990s”, Albert Pëllumbi critically examines Albania’s security paradigm following the seismic political shifts of the 1990s. The piece offers insights into Albania’s security dynamics and how they reverberated throughout the broader region. Concluding our selection with the article “The importance of EU Integration for Albania” by Erjona Reçi, elucidates the pivotal role of EU integration in Albania’s overarching journey towards political reform, socio-economic development, and regional stability. The discussion traverses the triumphs, challenges, and aspirations associated with Albania’s European path with a special focus on the Berlin Process.

We invite our readers to delve into these thought-provoking articles, challenge their preconceptions, and engage in the ongoing discourse surrounding this vital region.



National Identity of Kosovo

MSc. Naime IBRAHIMI

Abstract

The aim of paper is to explore the identity formation process of Kosovo and Albania. Kosovo and Albania have a long shared national identity because of a common ethnicity and history. The independence of Kosovo in 2008 has generated a debate about whether there is a new-born national identity of Kosovo — Kosovar. This thesis explores the implications that the process of state-building in Kosovo has on the Albanian identity of its population. In order to do so, the paper takes into analysis the impact that the invasions, international mechanisms, and independence had on the national identity. The analysis is done from the constructivist perspective. The methodology is qualitative and uses in-depth interviews with experts and discourse analysis. The thesis of this dissertation is that if the state of Kosovo becomes a successful state, this can further strengthen the state identity. This empowered identity can later bring new layers to the existing Albanian identity.

Keywords: *state-building, international mechanisms, national identity, EU integration.*

I. Introduction

Kosovo and Albania have a long shared national identity. Both Kosovo and Albania share a language, and before Kosovo's independence, they used the same national symbols such as flag, national anthem, football team, etc. Kosovo was declared as

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an independent state in 2008, which resulted in the creation of its own national symbols. These developments have generated a debate about whether there is a new-born national identity of Kosovo — the Kosovar. Yet, most of the people from Kosovo represent themselves as Albanians from Kosovo, not as Kosovars. There is a gap in the existing research on the Kosovo national identity. Therefore, this research aims to fulfil this gap and explore how the building of the new nation-state influence on the national identity of its people. The existing research stipulates that Kosovo's state-building has brought changes in its national identity, without erasing the previous one. This is understandable if we take in consideration that Kosovo is a new state, almost a decade old.

Constructivist theory is used to explore the national identity of Kosova. Constructivists use discourse analyses to argue that our consciousness is a construct of thoughts and beliefs, ideas, languages, symbols, and understandings between people, especially social groups, such as states and nations (Jackson et a., 2006, p.165). Constructivism shows that national identity is socially constructed and is not static.

II. Literature Review and Analytical Model

II.1 National Identity and Identity Construction

Identity is an umbrella term that is used in different disciplines like political science, sociology, philosophy, history, etc. and it is coined for the first time by German psychologist Erik Erikson in 1950 (Erikson, 1950, p. 223). Bloom (1990) pointed out that national identity is a condition where “a mass of people that has made the same identification with national symbols – have internalised the symbols of the nation ...” (p. 52). Similarly, Hogg and Abrams (1998) argued that identity is “people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others” (p. 2). It refers to either personal identity as an internal process and of social structures as an external process.

Personal identity deals with individuals as a unique person with its distinguishing characteristics, which are more or less immutable. Personal identity is self-category, which refers to ‘I’ and ‘me.’ Gorge Hebert Mead (1913) argued that self is a product of social interaction which let us know that there is a strong relationship with symbolic interactionist which means society affects social behaviour via its influence on self (p.149-172). According to Stryker and Burke (2000) there are a lot of roles that build a hierarchy within a person, which he called the hierarchy of salience (p. 286). They contended that a more salient identity/role is more likely to dominate in a different situation (p. 280-286).



On the other hand, social identity does not refer to 'I' and 'me' but 'us' vs. 'them.' Social identity deals with how people categorize themselves as part of a social group where they share similarities like a student, artists, women, men, ethnic groups, democrats, religious or nationalist, in-group and out-group (Turner et al., 1994, p.24). Social identity has three core components: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison (Tajfel, 1982, p.17-436). Social categorization is the process of categorizing people's similarities (in-group) and differences with other people (out-group). Since a nation is not composed of one person but a group of people, this means that a type of social identity is national identity.

In line with the reasoning of Turner and Tajfel, national identity can be explained based on three core components of social identity:

- National identity is a social-categorization where people identify their common characteristics by comparing with other nations and start feeling that they belong to a particular nation (Tajfel, 1982, p.17-436; Turner et al., 1999,6-36).
- Social identification: being part of a nation follows with behaviours of duty towards that nation (Tajfel, 1982; p.17-436 & Turner, 1970).
- The third component is competing with out-groups in terms of power to achieve a higher position in society, which means people fighting for dominance or prestige in comparison to other nations as called out-group nations (Tajfel,1982, p.17-436; Turner et al., 1999,6-36).

National identity is about the feeling of belonging to a nation or nation-state (Leoussi, 2001, p.248). This sense of belonging is directly related to the essential elements that make up a nation, such as a language, ethnicity, history, territory, religion, and culture (Leoussi, 2001, p.63). According to the theory of social identity, a nation could be called 'a nation' only when the people experience and feel it (Tajfel, 1974, p.69). The nation is not merely about the territory, language, flag, or history. It does not exist only there, but it is in peoples' minds and emotions (p. 68-69). Since nation is linked with emotions, it is not bounded to territory, therefore it can extend beyond state borders (Fichte, 1869, p.78-125). The nation can survive without territory such as Japan and Germany. A state can be multinational, like the USA, China, or Switzerland. There are cases of multinational states like Albania and Kosovo or East and West Germany, where the nation lies at the same time in two states or more. Nations can be multilingual like South Africa, Canada, or multireligious such as Russia, Albania, India. So, the nation is the spiritual unity of the people, and thus is "safeguarded" by the social cohesion of the people that share that identity.

There are two nation-state models: the French Model (Civic Nation) and the German Nation (Ethnic Nation). According to the French model, the state constructs the nation, because the state is created before the nation. Representatives of this approach are Ernest Renan and Fustel de Coulanges (Broomans, 2008, p.7). According to the French model, the nation is constructed on the bases of shared common institutional, territorial, and economic principles of the state (Renan 1996, p. 52-53.). For Renan, the nation is the result of an act of self-determination (p.233). In contrast, the German or Ethnic model represented by Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1869) asserts that the nation was born before the state like the case of Germany, Italy, the Balkan States, and the USSR. Fichte (1869) introduced the concept in the nineteenth century and advocates the idea that the boundaries of a nation are not defined by those of the territory of the state but are determined by several criteria that are independent of political affiliation such as language, history, culture, religious tradition (Fichte, 1869, p.78-125; as cited in James, 2015, p. 1-3).

National identity as a term is relatively new. It emerged in Europe in the 18th century. However, even though it is new, it is complex and a vast literature is built around it. Anderson (1983), contend that nations are products of modernity and have come to life as the result of print-capitalism that enabled the distribution of books in the 'national' language (p.36-140) and then made possible the creation of the 'imagined communities' (2006, p.36-140). Nations are 'imagined' because "people imagine themselves belonging to a community ... even though they have never met or even hear about each other, but only imagine their existence and shared identity" (Anderson, 2006, p.6). In the same vein, Gellner (1983) stated that the influence of industrialization and the education system had a significant impact on the creation of the national identity (Gellner, 1983, p.10-48). According to Gellner and Anderson and others that belong to the modernist approach, the national identity is socially constructed, and it is changeable.

Ethnosymbolists, such as Anthony D. Smith (1998) have a different approach. They fall between primordialist and modernist approaches. They agree that nations are products of modernity, however they don't appear out of nothing, but make use of pre-modern ethnic ties to come to life (Smith, 1998, p 18-109).

After this short introduction of theories on nations and national identity it is important to pose the question of Hastings (1997): "why do some ethnicities become nations while others do not?" (Hastings, 1997, p.10). In this process, written language is one of the most important elements considering that without this element, ethnicities cannot transform into nations. Wodak et al. (2011), argues that national identity is a product of language discourse (Wodak p.7-10). This means that language keeps alive memories and narratives. Without the spoken language nor the ability to transmit information, our memory of the past, of what already have happened, would have been impossible.



II.2 Kosovo and Albanian National Identity

The birth of the Albanian nationalism has taken place in two phases. The first phase began in the middle of the 19th century and ended at the beginning of the 20th century with the fall of the Ottoman Empire (Hoxhaj, 2007, p.81). The second phase took place in the late 20th century with the break-up of Yugoslavia (Hoxhaj, 2007, p.81). Albanians consider themselves to be very ancient and autochthonous in the Balkans. Nonetheless, the awareness of the Albanians and their efforts to build the nation-state emerged later than that of the other Balkan countries a nation is considered delayed (KIPRED, 2016 p.4). The Albanian nation has three different religions Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox. The Muslim religion was spread during the period the country was part of the Ottoman Empire, where about 2/3 of the Albanian people were converted to Islam (Kraja, 2019, p.220).

The second half of the 18th century is marked by the Albanian National Renaissance movement, which overcome religious divisions and sought to achieve peoples' unification by appealing to commonalities such as language and culture (Jacques,1995, p.276; KIPRED, 2016, p. 4). As Wodak argues, language is one of the main foundations of a nation and language and its discourse essential elements of the nation (Wodak et al. 2011). Language is also the determinant element to build social constructions because language survives and links the past, the present and the future of a given nations' history (Wodak et al., 2010, p.115). One of the main slogans of the Albanian Renaissance Movement is the statement of Pashko Vasa, "The religion of Albanians is Albanianism" (in Sulstarova, 2006, p.123). In the same vein, Sami Frasheri, one of the main representatives of the Renaissance, proclaimed that "An Albanian is Albanian before he is a Muslim or a Christian" (in Gashaj, 2014).

Albania declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912 and got its recognition by the Great Powers during the Conference of the Ambassadors in London in 1913. In this conference, Great Powers recognized only some parts of Albanian territories and left out outside the borders a great part of its territories (Ersoy et al., 2010, p.236). The Great Powers gave many Albanian territories to Montenegro, Macedonia, and Serbia (p.236). One of the territories that was left out was Kosovo. This process was followed by a long struggle of Kosovo's resistance to Yugoslav and then Serbian rulers, and the unending war for the reunion with Albania (Kraja, 2019, p. 127). With the end of the II World War, Kosovo was left within the borders of Yugoslavia. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the domino effect it instigated throughout the Socialist Camp, came the break-up of Yugoslavia. Similarly with the other former ex- Yugoslavia States, Kosova also attempted to gain its independence. The long process for achieving it is not part

of this paper. It finally got its independence in 2008, after a bloody war, NATO intervention and international organizations oversight of the country.

Kosovo is a multi-ethnic country where with 90% of its population are Albanians. After it got its independence, emerged questions such as: Did a new nation emerge? Is it different from Albanian? Does it impact only the political identity or the national one as well? The majority of Kosovo peoples feel Albanians rather than Kosovar (Murati, 2004, p.7). However, Nexhmedin Spahiu and Halil Matoshi argue that Kosovo people have a distinct national identity from Albanians. In an article at daily newspaper MAPO, Spahiu commented “as long as we have a Kosovo state, we have a Kosovar nation” (Spahiu, 2014, p.6). His argument is mainly based on the Ahtisaari plan that mentions the Kosovar nation which, according to Spahiu, is a “constitutional type” of the “Kosovar nation” and Blair and Clinton’s speeches that wished “long life to the young Kosovar nation” (Hyseni, 2015, p.1). Gashi shares the same view. He argues that due to the different paths the Albanians and Kosovars have taken, due to the long period they haven’t communicated together (during the communist regime), the two people have developed different national identities (2016, p.3). On the other hand, Qosja (2006) argues that “Kosova identity is part of the Albanian identity” (p.15). Mehmet Kraja shares the same opinion. For him, Kosovar Identity is a local identity, part of the Albanian identity in general (2019, p.518).

II.3 Analytical Framework – Social Constructivism

The theoretical framework used for this paper is social constructivism because it best explains that through interactions, nations, nationalism, and national identity are born and shaped (Green, 2002, p.31). Constructivism is a theory that has received attention after the shortcomings of realism and liberalism theory to predict and analyse the cold war (Jung, 2019, p.1-2). Constructivism is about how people acquire knowledge (Peck & Mummery, 2018, p.389–407). It is a theory that attempts to explain how humans gain knowledge and meaning from the interaction with others (Hurd, 2009, p.5-7). Constructivists analyse “discourse” to argue that our consciousness is built by our thoughts and beliefs, ideas, languages, symbols, and understandings among people, especially social groups, such as states and nations (Jackson et al., 2006, p.165). They consider that national self-understanding is produced and reproduced in interaction processes and discourses (Fearon & Laitin, 2000, p.54). As Calhoun stated (2007) nations do not exist “objectively” before they exist discursively” (p.27.).

Nations and national identities have been constructed and shaped due to three important events 1) the emergence of industrialism, 2) the creation of states, and 3) the spread of mass education and mass literacy (Anderson, 2006, p.20-46;



Gellner, 1983, p.20-83). Ernest Gellner claimed that “born industrialism helped social mobility and competition,” which required the need for national identities (O’Leary, 1997, p.191–222). Additionally, Benedict Anderson highlighted that nationalism is built through the means of a common language, mass education, and media and that a nation as a community can only imagine that other people, who they never met, share the same cultural code (Anderson, 2006, p.20-140).

According to Martha Finnemore, a constructivist scholar of international relations, international organizations shape the basic principles of states and their functioning (Finnemore,1996 p.9). She argues that international organizations play an important role in the process of creating interest and national identity. She acknowledged that international organizations are facilitators between states to reach cooperation in the international system Based on her point of view, international organizations produce interests that affect national identity (Finnemore, 1996, p.15). In the case of Kosovo, the European Union, the Ahtisaari Plan, and other organizations involved in the process of state-building and independence of Kosovo have influenced the identity of actors who have produced social constructions in the state of Kosovo. Finnemore argues that the interests and identities of the nations are dependent upon the bureaucracy of the international organizations and institutions (Finnemore,1996 p.36).

The interdependence and benefits that the states gain from international institutions, incentivizes them to join different international institutions. Dependin on the form of the organization, privileges and benefits could be free trade, multilateral diplomacy, collective security, decolonization, protection of human rights, international law, cooperation, peaceful settlements of disputes, democratic governance and infrastructure aid. To get these benefits, states should fulfil some criteria (Barnett & Finnemore 1999, p.702). The European Union and the United Nations are mediators between Kosovo and Serbia to reach peace through cooperation. From this follows the following reason, why Kosovo is interdependent to the international organization:

- 1) the separation “de facto” of Kosovo from Serbia under UN;
- 2) to get accepted “de jure” by them as a sovereign state and
- 3) integration to European Union.

To get all the benefits from International Organizations, Kosovo had to follow their rules. Also, Kosovo has to make changes in its constitution and many national symbols such as the flag and national anthem (Thaci, 2018, p.10; Shehu, 2007, p.1). Additionally, the international organizations have prohibited Kosovo to use the same colours of Albania flag and any sign that represent Albania. Even November 28 – the Albanian Flag Day, for which many people from Kosovo have

given their lives, was not included in the national holiday of Kosovo. Moreover, the international organizations that oversighted its independence, stipulated that Kosovo is a multinational state even though 90% of the population are Albanians and they have prohibited its unification with Albania (Sallova, 2015,p.105-107; Mushkolaj, 2018; Kalemaj, 2014, p.31). All these changes have influence the Kosovo National Identity.

To do this research, I have used a qualitative approach by conducting in-depth interviews. MAXQDA software is used for analysing the interviews with the eleven experts.

III. Analysis – Kosovo National Identity

III.1 Kosovo's National Movement during Yugoslavia

Following the London Conference (1912-1913), Kosovo and many Albanian territories remained outside Albania and under the Serbian and Montenegrin regimes. During WWI, Kosovo was divided into two administrative zones, ruled by Austria and the Bulgaria (Kostovicova, 2005, p.36). The parts that were under the Bulgarian administration were banned to use the Albanian language, the flag, and their national symbols, where this was followed by other ill-treatments (Kostovicova, 2005, p.36-37). On the other hand, the Austrians, allowed for the employment and the self-administration of Albanians, education in the Albanian language and the use of the flag (Kostovicova,2005, p.36-37).

However, in 1918, Kosovo was again occupied by Serbia. Under its reign, Albanian rights were denied, such as the use of the flag, education in the Albanian language, print media in Albanian and publications in the Albanian language. Population was also disarmed (Gashi, 2012, p.18). Albanians continued their fight to gain their rights. With the creation of the Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom in 1918, Kosovo remained under this kingdom. After the end of the World War II, it changed its name to Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1963). It consisted of 6 Republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and two provinces: Kosovo and Vojvodina. The republics enjoyed the right to secede and preserve their national identity. Kosovo was 90% inhabited by Albanians and was the third-largest population in Yugoslavia. Despite this fact, Albanians did not enjoy the national rights as other republics because they were only considered a minority (Çeku, 2014, p.2).

Many nationalist movements were formed on the principle of resistance to the Yugoslavian forces, including the National Defence Committee, which aimed to unite Kosovo with Albania. During 1919, Serbia, adopted the law of



“agrarian reform” which largely expropriated Albanian lands and settled about 70,000 Slavic settlers (Noli, 1976, p.247). A total of 240,000 Albanians from Kosovo fled to Albania and Turkey (Kraja, 2019, p.77). In 1941, it was estimated that the number of the Albanian population in Kosovo had dropped to 70% (Kraja, 2019, p.77).

In 1937, the Yugoslavia-Turkey agreement was drafted to relocate around 4,000 Albanians to Turkey on the pretext that the remaining Muslim Turks from the Ottoman Empire would be displaced. Still, the agreement could not be implemented due to World War II (Kraja, 2019, p.77-78). During the Second World War, the territory of Kosovo was divided into three areas Italian-German-Bulgarian (Kodra, 1996, p.106). To gain the support of the Albanians, the Italians announced the unification of Kosovo with Albania and allowed the use of the flag, the use of print media in Albanian, and the administration of the area by the Albanians (Bejko et al., 2015 p.1).

After the withdrawal of Italian and then German forces, Kosovo was annexed again by Serbia. The revolts of the Albanians against such situation were crushed and around 4,000 Albanians lost their lives. Thousands of other bodies were thrown into the sea during this time (Butka, 1994, p.116).

Religion was dealt differently on the different sides of the border. In Albania, with the separation from the Ottoman Empire, all efforts were made to Europeanise the country. In Yugoslavia, the authorities stimulated the application of Islam in Kosovo, allowing thus Albanian politics to take place only on religious grounds. The same continued even after the Second World War. Even though, the Albanian population were lacking human rights, in terms of religion they were allowed to exercise it. The Albanian population of Kosovo used the religious scripts to learn to write and read in Albanian. In their attempts to prevent the rise of Albanian nationalism, Serbian authorities have brought imams from Bosnia to Kosovo to lecture on Islam in languages other than Albanian (KIPRED,2016, p.21). It was also not uncommon for Serbs to try to identify Albanians as “Turks”, attempting thus to identify the conflict as one between Muslims and Christian Orthodox.

For a very short period of time, Albanians in Kosovo were allowed to open several educational and publishing institutions, but in 1947 Serbia took this right again, banning the symbols of the nation, the language, and Kosovo’s institutions. Furthermore, Albanians were disarmed and forced to surrender their weapons. The situation was that if they did not have one, they were forced to buy it and hand it over in order to avoid violence (Prifti, 2002, p.487). During this time, 2,500 Albanians migrated to Turkey. The non-assimilation of Albanians from the great loss of “human resources” was the large increase in birth rates (Kraja, 2019, p.287). Due to the uninterrupted demand and demonstrations of Albanians

during the late 60's and early 70's, a new Constitution (The Constitution of the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo) was adopted on February 28, 1974 by the Assembly of Kosovo and the Assembly of Yugoslavia. Kosovo gained the status of an autonomous province of Serbia. It replaced the Kosovo Constitutional Law of 1963. The new Constitution provided Kosovo with a higher degree of constitutional, legislative and judicial autonomy and the Albanians were allowed to use their flag. Following this the University of Pristina, the Academy of Sciences and Arts were established and exchange visits and organization of educational and cultural activities between the University of Tirana and Prishtina were allowed as well (Syla, 2015, p1-4; Kadriu, 2019, p-1-2).

Even though the new constitution gave Albanians of Kosovo a higher degree of rights, the oppression, exploitation and injustice persisted. The students' protests in 1981 gave rise to a series of protests from all the population; they became a popular movement. The main leitmotif of the protests was that of giving to Kosovo the status of the Republic. Slogans of the protesters were: "We want a Republic," "A republic, a constitution, without hatred or war," "Kosovo of Kosovars" "We love our national flag," "We want the unification of Albanian lands". These protests fuelled Albanian nationalism (Hysa, 2020, p.1).

With the death of Yugoslav leader of that time, Josip Broz Tito and the arrival of Slobodan Milosevic in 1987, the situation for Albanians became even more difficult. Their demands were not only ignored, but they were also threatened by a 1974 constitutional amendment, which foresaw the abolition of Kosovo's autonomy. As a sign of resistance to the abolition of autonomy, Trepça miners went on a hunger strike for two weeks to restore autonomy, by becoming thus the engine of resistance movements (Klan, 1999, p.106-114). Yugoslav authorities then declared a state of emergency and sent about 15,000 federal police troops under Serbian leadership to Kosovo, where they began a campaign to re-establishing a civil order (Haxhiaj & Stojanovic, 2020, p.3). Under the state of emergency, the Yugoslav government gathered the MPs of Kosovo Assembly, who surrounded by tanks and police forces, were forced to vote for the change. The new constitution was adopted in 1989. It abolished Kosovo's autonomy and declared Kosovo part of Serbia (KIPRED, 2007, p.8).

The situation after this deteriorated significantly: many Kosovars were massively fired and national media, hospitals, factories, and the University were closed. Many young Kosovars serving in the Yugoslav army (Akademia e Shkencave, 2002, p.389). The massive firing of Albanian workers led thousands of Kosovo Albanian to emigrate to other countries. By the end of 1989 the first political party (Democratic League of Kosovo) headed by Ibrahim Rugova was founded (Historiku i Lidhjes Demokratike të Kosovës, 2020, p. 1). The party organized the political and civic resistance and organized social life. The Assembly of Kosovo proclaimed the



Republic of Kosovo and announced: “constitutional declaration of Kosovo as an independent and equal unit within the federation (confederation) of Yugoslavia and as an equal subject with other units in the federation (confederation)” (KTV, 2015, p. 1), which didn’t receive international recognition (Jashari, 2015, p. 1). A year later, a referendum was held on the declaration of independence and with a massive turnout of 99.87 % of citizens, about 90 % of them voted for Kosovo as an independent state. From this moment, parallel structures are at place (Nguyen, 2018, p.45; Rugova, 2005, p.335). Kosovo Albanians rejected all institutions occupied by Serbs and set up parallel institutions such as political, health, cultural, educational, where even private homes were turned into schools and universities. The first parliamentary elections were held in Kosovo in 1992, and Ibrahim Rugova was elected President. This year also marks the break-up of Yugoslavia. This period is considered as the peaceful resistance of Kosovo. However, when at Dayton Conference the problem of Kosovo was left aside (Borger, 2015, p.1-9), Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was established in 1997.

The death of Adam Jashari with other 57 people including his family members (Flamuri & Flamuri, 1999, p.284) after an attack from Yugoslav army, escalated the situation. This was followed by the the massacre in Reçak, where 45 Kosovo Albanian civilians were massacred by Slobodan Milosevic’s policies (Wilesmith, 2019, pp. 1-9). This event was considered a turning point for the war and the liberation of Kosovo. It received the attention of international institutions. NATO organized the Interim Agreement for Peace and Self-Government in Kosovo otherwise known as Rambouillet Agreement (February 6 – March 22, 1999) to draft a peace agreement between Serbia and Kosovo. The conference aimed to end the violence by Slobodan Milosevic’s political regime and provide stability for the two countries. Yugoslavs refused to sign the accords and this was used latter by NATO as a justification to bomb Yugoslavia. The bombing lasted 78 days and on June 12, 1999 it ended with the capitulation of the Serbian army. This was followed by the deployment of NATO troops and the withdrawal of Serbian forces. This marked the end of the war in Kosovo.

Following this, UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1244, which set Kosovo under UN international administration, and therefore “around 37, 200 KFOR soldiers from 36 countries were sent to Kosovo” (Koha, 2019, p.1; Resolution 1244 in 1999). During the war, “13,500 people lost their lives, most of them civilians, 10,812 were Albanians, 2,197 Serbs and 526 members of other ethnic communities. Also, 6,044 people were reported as missing and 1,000 of them were non-Albanian communities” (Haxhiaj, 2018, p.1-10). Around 12,000 houses were burned, and about 1 million Albanians were displaced and found shelter in Albania, Macedonia, Europe, and beyond (Haxhiaj, 2018, p-1-10).

III. 2 The Role of International Organizations in Kosovo

Following the intervention in Kosovo, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1244, which placed Kosovo under international protection and administration (Mustafa et al., 2016, p.16). The resolution set Kosovo *de facto* separated from Serbia, but *de jure* it kept Kosovo an autonomous part of the Yugoslavia Republic. Hence, under NATO command, called by the United Nations, the deployment of KFOR armed forces was authorized. The resolution consisted to four pillars for determining the future status (KIPRED, 2005, p.83):

- Pillar I: Humanitarian Issues, led by UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees);
- Pillar II: Civil Administration, headed by UNMIK (United Nations Mission Interim for Kosovo);
- Pillar III: Democratization and building of institutions, led by OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe; and,
- Pillar IV: Economic Development, under the supervision of the European Union.

The situation was complex and there was a lack of understanding of what it meant and what impact international administration would have in Kosovo (Kraja, 2019, p.303-345). With all the benefits these organization brought, they had also the side effect of weakening the local practices. Furthermore, the role that these institutions in the country affected the national identity of the country. Following the war, the demands for peace and normalization in the Balkans were growing. Maintaining regional stability has become a key element for internationals. Any statement or action expressing nationalist elements was seen as a threat to destabilization. There were many cases when KFOR forced the removal of posters of KLA members with reference to the war (Kraja, 2019, p.118). The option of Kosovo unification with Albania was rejected by the international community. A Greater Albania was not seen well from the neighbouring countries and this could lead to the destabilization of the region (Veseli, 2017, p.1). Also, those who came from the side of the war with the idea of unification with Albania were threatened that they would be sent to the Hague for war trial (Kraja, 2019, p.225). This action proved once again that Albanians in general and in this case, Kosovo was never a determinant of its actions but was dependent on external forces (Hoxhaj, 2013, p.2).

Various organizations, including UNMIK, allocated most of their funds for multi-ethnic programs (Egleder, 2013, p.94-274; Kraja, 2019, p.158). Many Kosovo-



Serbs were placed in decision-making positions in order to have institutions with multi-ethnic representation. Textbooks were required to have less content of historical memory so that the younger generations would be as open as possible to the Serbs. During this time, Kosovo also faced bilingualism under UNMIK administration, where English was also declared as an official language (Bojaxhi et al., 2016, p. 2-3). In general, projects related to the promotion and cultivation of the Albanian language were considered as nationalistic.

The process for determining the final status of Kosovo officially began in 2005 and in 2007, the so-called “Ahtisaari Plan or Ahtisaari Package” was submitted.

III.2.1 The Ahtisaari Plan

In order to define the status of Kosovo, the UN Secretary-General asked the former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari to submit a Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement (CSP), non-formally known as the Ahtisaari Plan. (Bajrami, 2010, p. 21-39). The proposal was submitted in February 2007 by Martti Ahtisaari himself as the special envoy for

Kosovo’s status. This proposal was supported by the European Parliament but was opposed by Serbia (Gjon et al., 2010, p. 291-312). This plan guided the formation of a multi-ethnic country and the preservation of the national identity of minorities, especially Serbs. This document consists of twelve annexes covering constitutional provisions, rights of communities and their members, decentralization of the local government, justice system, religious and cultural heritage, international debt, property and archives, national security, International Civilian Representative, European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) Rule of Law mission, International Military Presences (KFOR) and Legislative agenda (U.S. Department of State, February 22, 2008).²

Throughout this document the Albanian language was mentioned only once, and the word ‘Albanian’ was not mentioned at all (Ahtisaari, 2007, p. 1-52). Ahtisaari Plan made Serbian the second official language (Ahtisaari, 2007, p. 3) and it stipulated the condition for specific seats for Serbs in the Assembly of Kosovo. The plan provided for the representation of Kosovo’s non-Albanians in key public institutions to safeguard their rights and to encourage their active participation in public life (Ahtisaari, 2007, p. 18-19). The Kosovo Serb community were provided with a high degree of responsibility over its own affairs, extensive financial autonomy and allowed to receive funding from Serbia and take part in inter-municipal partnerships and cross-boundary cooperation with Serbian institutions. Six Serb-majority municipalities were established or greatly expanded: Gracanica, Novo Brdo, Klokott, Ranilug, Partes and Mitrovica-North (Ahtisaari, 2007, p. 20-21). Also, the document provided to safeguard the Serbian Orthodox Church in

² <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/fs/101244.htm>: Summary of the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement

Kosovo (more than 40 key religious and cultural sites). The Serbian Orthodox Church was granted property rights, exemption from taxes and customs duties and was free to maintain links with the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade.

(Ahtisaari, 2007, p.30-37).

The document also assessed that the conflict between Kosovo and Serbia was an ethnic conflict. Additionally, the Ahtisaari Package cemented the international protectorate in Kosovo through the establishment of the International Civilian Representation which would supervise the implementation of the Plan and have ultimate authority over its interpretation (Ahtisaari, 2007, p.43-48). This document called for the demobilization of the KPC-Kosovo Protection Corps, a continuation of the KLA (Ahtisaari, 2007, p.56). The document requested the creation of a flag of a multi-ethnic character and forbade the use of red, black, or eagle as important elements of the Albanian flag (Ahtisaari, 2007, p.3-4). The same was required with the anthem. The country had to create a new anthem with as few Albanian characters as possible. Also, the Ahtisaari package banned Kosovo from unifying with any other state (Ahtisaari, 2007, p.3).

In a way, this document aimed to promote a new national identity that would distinguish Kosovo from Albania. The package also stipulated that the constitution was not subject to referendum approval by the people, but it had to be approved by the International Civilian Representative and formally approved by the Kosovo Assembly (Ahtisaari, 2007, p.11).

III.2.2 Kosovo as an Independent State

With the acceptance of the Ahtisaari Plan by the political elite, Kosovo was declared an independent and sovereign State with international supervision, on February 17, 2008. It was recognized by 23 countries out of 28 of the European Union, and in total by 116 countries out of 195 countries (MFA, 2020, p.1). The path of state-building and international recognition of Kosovo limited the relations between Albania and Kosovo. Kosovo's long resistance and the war with Serbia were an attempt for freedom and unification with Albania and an attempt to create a new nation-state. With the independence of Kosovo and the impossibility of unification with Albania, the Ahtisaari Plan declared the Republic of Kosovo a multi-ethnic state, thus recognizing Kosovo no longer as a state with only one national identity, that is Albanian identity and therefore making even more impossible the unification with Albania since the idea of the unification was based on the unification of two states with the same national identity (Gallucci, 2011, p. 4). Consequently, this led the path for creating a new state identity (Kraja, 2019, p.145).

The flag of Kosovo is yellow, white, and blue, with the map of Kosovo in the middle and six stars above, representing the main ethnic and cultural communities living in Kosovo. The anthem only melody without lyrics, and it doesn't represent

neither its history nor it has any relation with the Albanian language. According to Benedict Anderson – it's exactly the national anthems, or national poems and songs, the singing of which makes, among other things, the experience or imagination of the common community, i.e., the nation (2013, p.193), the anthem and flag of Kosovo doesn't help to imagine the common community between Kosovo and Albania. The importance given to the Serbian language, the high degree of competences and autonomy given to municipalities with Serbian population majority (Kraja, 2019, p.301), the special protection provided to the cultural and religious monuments of the Orthodox Church are all factors that hinders the old national identity of Kosova and lead to the creation of a new identity. A series of cultural and political rights belong only to Serbs when they are recognized as a nation. In contrast, the Kosovo Albanians are presented only as residents of the state of Kosovo and not as people having an existing identity, that is the Albanian national identity.

With the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo on April 9, 2008, by the Assembly of Kosovo, the preamble reads: "We, the people of Kosovo, determined to build a future for Kosovo as a free, democratic and peace-loving country, that will be a homeland to all of its citizens. Committed to the creation of a state of free citizens that will guarantee the rights of every citizen, civil freedoms and equality of all citizens before the law". However, in comparison with other countries in the Western Balkans such as North Macedonia and Serbia, one may easily observe that the emphasis in their preambles is on history, on the people. This is lacking in the case of the constitution of Kosovo as if the country doesn't have its own history and its own people (Sulejman, 2016, p.2). According to Kraja, the future was given to the state of Kosovo, but the history was erased.

Kosovo started as an international project and ended up as such. Kosovo's new status did not come as a will of the Kosovo Albanian people because they it was not given the opportunity to express itself in a referendum. Kosovo status was the result of a compromise imposed by international decision-makers (Kraja,2019,15).

The genocidal memory was still fresh, but for Kosovo, the separation from Serbia was important, and the only option was relying on the international organizations. The emotional connection that Kosovo Albanians had with Albanian symbols was evident from the day of the declaration of independence, where citizens covered the squares with the red and black Albanian national flag to celebrate the independence, a tradition that continues to be present at many gatherings, feast, burial or at home. Kosovo's anthem and the state flag are used more by those who have a legal or constitutional obligation to present the state. Additionally, Albania's Independence Day (November 28) was not included in the state official holidays, but people give priority to the historical tradition and emotional connection with this date by celebrating it every year (Kraja, 2019, p. 479).

In a way, Kosovo Albanians were confronted with both state and national identities. According to Ahtisaari package, Albanian national practices were allowed at private gatherings, however Kosovo state symbols had to represent the country at official meetings and events. According to Ernest Gellner, “nationalist sentiment is deeply offended by violations of the nationalist principle of congruence of state and nation” (Gellner, 2009, p. 128). Most of the interviewees agrees that Kosovo has become a modern state, but a long journey is ahead. There are two different approaches in terms of the influence that Ahtisaari package had and have on the national identity of Kosovo: One perspective is that the Ahtisaari package helped to create a new state but not a new identity (Dehari, May 20, 2020), and the second perspective is that it did create a new Kosovar identity different from the Albanian identity. Dehari contends that the Albanian identity is not specifically linked with the Albanian state creation, thus it is older than the state itself. Therefore, for Kosovo people Albanian national identity is not linked only with the state itself but rather with the history of the people, and thus it cannot be easily erased. In the same line, Krasniqi holds the idea that due to the harsh and bitter experience that Kosovo people and Serbs had for a very long time, it is difficult to create a nation-state (21 May, 2020). Lluka and Sejdiu hold a similar idea. The Kosovo state symbols have to be respected by the all, but people feel that they belong to the Albanian national identity (Lluka, May 18, 2020; Sejdiu, May 20, 2020).

Demaj (May 29, 2020) contend that Ahtisaari plan had no impact on the national feelings and that in Kosovo there is no dilemma about national identity belonging, because the majority of Kosovo Albanians feel “Albanian with Kosovar citizenship”. Asked about the tension between state and nation in the case of Kosovo, Nezej (May 29, 2020) argues that Kosovo did not have the chance to select between the state or the identity. While Albanian national identity remains permanent, the state symbolizes the efforts of the Albanian ethnic majority to govern itself.

Matoshi and Spahiu follow a different logic. Matoshi (20 May, 2020) argues that the Ahtisaari plan has enabled the creation of a new Kosovar national identity, based on the premise that the Albanian ethnic identity is static, in a time when national identity is a changing variable. According to him, after the independence in 2008 the ethnic nationalism turned into a statist (or civic) nationalism. He believes that in the context of globalization, national identities are “fused” into state identities and thus the state of Kosovo automatically represent the nation of Kosovo. Spahiu (May 19, 2020), argues that the state is an apparatus which consists of institutions, i.e., the presidency, the ministry, the parliament, the courts, the prosecution, the army, the policy, etc., while the nation is the community that wones that state. *De facto* or *de jure* the owners of the state of Kosovo, are all citizens of Kosovo. According to him, the nation should be complemented by the principles of the French revolution “*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*”.



III.2. 3 Integration into the European Union

According to Ahtisaari's plan, one of the first steps Kosovo should take was to accept the EU Mission through EULEX, which is responsible for ensuring the rule of law, and the International Civilian Representative responsible for implementing the Ahtisaari package (Ppio, n.d, pp. 1-2). Taking into consideration Kosovo's location in Europe as well as Kosovo's commitment to join the European Union, the idea of Kosovo's EU integration was present even before independence. An acceptance and definition of a state identity different from that of Albania were considered an easier way to achieve Kosovo's EU integration (Kraja, 2019, p. 507). Europe is not interested in attracting unresolved conflicts with the accession of Kosovo and Serbia to the European Union. Thus, the EU has conditioned Kosovo to accept Ahtisaari plan's conditions, especially the one with Serbia, in order to allow the advancement of the process of Kosovo's integration. Kosovo has been part of the Western Balkans integration process since 2002 through the Tracking Mechanism of Stabilization and Association Process and Stabilization and Association Process Dialogue. EU did not offer Kosovo the same process of membership it had offered to the other Western Balkan countries. Kosovo made efforts to meet EU requirements and the European Union began the dialogue process at the end of 2010 between the two governments, that of Kosovo and Serbia. The discussions aimed to normalize the difficult situation from the Declaration of Independence of Kosovo in February 2008.

The Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) was signed on 27 October 2015, by Federica Mogherini, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and by Johannes Hahn, the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations and by Isa Mustafa, the Prime Minister of Kosovo, and Bekim Çollaku, the Minister of European Integration and Chief Negotiator (Council of the EU, 2015, p. 1). This agreement was a big step towards EU integration. Kosovo is a potential candidate for the future enlargement of the European Union and is making efforts towards it integration (Koeth, 2012, p. 31-36).

Citizens of the Republic of Kosovo are the only ones in the region who are subject to the visa regime. Çollaku (May 22, 2020), argues that conditions for visa liberalization and EU integration could be a factor that may push Kosovo to strengthen its Kosovar national identity.

IV. Conclusions: Kosovo National Identity

The Albanian identity is a dynamic issue influenced by a variety of ideological, social, political, geopolitical and geo-cultural factors. The study confirmed the assumption that the Albanian identity has several layers which are not necessarily

coherent with each other. Due to fractures and disconnections, there is an amnesia for different periods of history and therefore there are discussion on what an Albanian identity really is.

Nonetheless, the interviews and the other data confirmed that despite five hundred years of Ottoman invasion, one century of living within Yugoslavia and later under Serbian invasion, the Albanian identity remained strong. It is important to mention that the during the Ottoman invasion, Kosova and Albanian were together and thus they had the same national identity, which is not specifically linked with the formation of the Albanian state in 1912. Kosovo has actively contributed to the creation of the Albanian state, and this has strengthened the common national identity and consciousness.

The separation of Kosovo from Albania after the Conference of London created two different paths for the Kosovo and Albania in terms of political, social and economic development. The two parts of once the same nation, followed different trajectories. The Albanian population of Kosovo pursued their efforts to unite with Albania and to preserve their national identity. The oppression they have faced, an oppression made on ethnicity grounds, helped to strengthen their Albanian national identity. However, the inability join Albania, has led Kosovo to create a new reality for the construction of an independent state. In its efforts to resist the oppression from Yugoslavia and later Serbia, Kosovo had to establish its own institutions, movements and leaders. This was further enforced by the lack of communication with Albania during communism. Furthermore, the establishment of Kosovo state was necessary help Kosovars from the ethnic cleansing from the Serbian state. In such conditions, the support of the international community was inevitable and only through its help Kosovo achieved its independence. For achieving this, it had to 'sacrifice' some important element of its national identity such as flag, anthem, and the use of the 'Albanian' national identity as a term *per se*.

As an independent state, Kosovo has its national representation in sports, art, and culture and this has contributed to deepening the divide between Albania and Kosovo and somehow has helped to strengthen the new Kosovo national identity.

There are two different perspectives in terms of Kosovo national identity. One perspective contends that despite having the state of Kosovo, the Kosovars feel Albanians and thus that their national identity has not changed. The second perspective contends that a new national identity has emerged. It is still on the making, but it will be an identity with its own characteristics and elements which will not refer to the past and the Albanian identity. The first perspective places a lot of emphasis on the customs, norms and culture as important elements of a nation identity and as such Kosovo national identity cannot be perceived as detached from the Albanian national identity. Even when new customs emerge, they take into account the existing ones and thus integrate the new tradition in the existing

identity. According to Siljadic, “If the whole spiritual, intellectual, and cultural experience of a particular people is imagined as a single tree with many branches, then tradition is at its root: like the tree to survive and grow, it must have strong roots that nourish it and make it sprout new shoots year after year” (2006, p.55). Therefore, it is difficult to imagine the birth of a new Kosovar nation, without having any relation with the Albanian national identity.

The second perspective holds that the national identity is not static or something natural, but it is a social construct that constantly experiences changes in form and content. Interviews have shown that if the state of Kosovo becomes a successful state, this could lead to strengthening of the state identity of Kosovo. This empowered identity can later bring new layers to the existing identity and effectuate changes. The construction of a new Kosovo national identity seems difficult but not impossible.

The EU integration of Albania and Kosovo might have its influence on the national identity of Kosovo. In this scenario, the need of unification for the two countries will decrease, the border will become insignificant and cooperation in all aspects will be greater.

In the end, we may conclude that the national identity of Kosovo will depend on the political, social and economic developments of the country and international developments in the region which will continue to influence the country’s path towards EU integration and stabilization and cooperation in the region.

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Implications of Organized Crime in the National Security of the Western Balkans After the 1990. Case Study: Albania _____

_____ *MSc. Edmond MERDANI* _____

Abstract

National and transnational organized crime today constitutes one of the most serious threats and challenges to the national security of Albania, of the countries in the region and beyond. The geographical position of the Balkan region, along with the region's own problematics, such as its criminality and weak government structures, have turned the region not only in a shortcut to the criminal activity originating from Asia and the Middle East that heads for Western Europe, but also in an attractive and lucrative path in terms of the low risk it poses to criminal groups. This paper aims at providing a conceptual framework for the phenomenon of organized crime, by focusing on the issues that I have identified and considered as of serious importance to the Albania and region's democratic values, political stability, social and economic development, as well as their security environment. In this context, I have argued that organized crime has political implications, largely due to its transnational nature, as it does not recognize state borders and thus ignores and challenges the state sovereignty. It also has economic implications, mainly associated with the criminal activity of money laundering, the informal economy it stimulates and the financial and economic destabilization it provokes. The study seeks to answer to the raised research questions through the analysis of the causes, factors, legal framework as well as of the strategies and measures taken by the respective countries and relevant

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institutions in the context of the fight against this phenomenon. On the other hand, in addition to the main theoretical approaches used to describe the phenomenon, the study analyses Albania's security and crime policies and strategies by comparing them with those of the regional countries in order to highlight the similarities and differences.

Key words: *organized crime, transnational crime, illegal trafficking, money laundering, corruption.*

I. Introduction

This paper aims to analyze the phenomenon of Organized Crime (OC) for a complete understanding of the causes and factors that promote its emergence, evolution and sophistication as well as the strategies and policies for the fight against this phenomenon, with the aim of reaching some conclusions regarding the implications, danger, threats and challenges it poses to Albania and other Western Balkan (WB) countries, as well as to their society, economy and democratic order.

The objectives of the study to achieve the intended goal are: Analysis of the implications that OC brings to the national security of the WB after the '90s; identification of the factors and causes that have influenced the emergence, evolution and consolidation of the OC in Albania after the '90s; identification of the features and characteristics of the OC in Albania after the '90s; and presentation of the national policies and strategies as well as the joint policies to get an understanding of this phenomenon in Albania and WB. In this framework, the research question that the study is: Which are the basic implications of the OC after the '90s in the security environment of WB in general and Albania in particular? And the hypothesis: The basic implications of the OC after the '90s in the security environment of WB and Albania are linked with the political instability, erosion of the sovereignty (democratic institutions) and weak economies, which are destabilizing factors for the state and society as a whole.

The methodology of this paper is based on the descriptive method to identify different concepts such as the OC phenomenon, as well as the analytical method where the main goal has been to get an understanding of the implications of this phenomenon in the national security of the countries of the region as well as Albania after the '90s.

II. Literature review

The Balkans, otherwise known as the *Balkan Peninsula*, is a geographical area located in the southeast of the European continent. Many definitions and meanings are associated with it, including geopolitical and historical ones. For Wiberg, the Balkans was the border between the Habsburg and Turkish empires (Wiberg, 1994:8). Whereas the Cambridge dictionary defines the Balkans as a region that lies in southeastern Europe between the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea (Cambridge dictionary, 2019). In view of a more detailed description of the geographical position of the Balkan Peninsula, it can be affirmed that Balkan Peninsula term means the area bounded by the Adriatic Sea to the west, the Ionian Sea to the southwest, the Aegean Sea to the south and southeast, the Marmara Sea to the east and the Black Sea in the east and northeast.

As the natural western, southern and eastern border of the peninsula has been easily defined due to the maritime borders, the northern border has been difficult to be defined geographically in a universally accepted way due to the lack of a natural border. However, one supposed northern border is the Danube-Sava-Koper line and the other is the line connecting the northern ends of the Adriatic Sea (Koper, Slovenia) and the Black Sea (Odessa, Ukraine).

The Balkans has an area of about 550,000 km², a population of about 55 million inhabitants with different identity, ethnic, cultural and political composition (Okey, 2007). This population lives in 12 countries to include Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and European part of Turkey.

The historian Robert de Vaugondy was the first to use the concept of the Balkans or Balkan Peninsula in 1775 in the “Grand Atlas” (Carter, 1977:7). For the first time in political literature, these concepts were used by the German geographer August Zeune in 1808 (Zöpel, 2018:2).

Various researchers argue that the most accepted definition of the concept of the Balkans originates from the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in 1914, which sparked the start of the First World War. However, at that time, the Balkans, rather than a geographical area, was referred to as an area where chaos, quarrels and primitive conflicts prevailed, along with the equally archaic ways of solving them. It was due to this opinion, that the invention of term ‘balkanization’ after the First World War was also encouraged, which according to the Bulgarian academic Maria Todorova “referred mainly to a process of nationalist fragmentation of the former geographical and political units into new, problematic and stable states” (Todorova, 1997:32). “Balkanization not



only had come to denote the parcelization of large and viable political units but also had become a synonym for a reversion to the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian” (Todorova, 1997:3).

As a conclusion, it can be affirmed that among researchers outside the region, the Balkans has been referred to a region close to Europe in the geographical sense but far and different from it in the sense of culture, mindset, development and civilization. On the other hand, there are efforts from the region’s countries and researchers to point out the indisputable European identity and perspective of the Balkans.

The term *geopolitics* comes from Greek roots (Γη - land and Πολιτική - politics) and in its general sense describes the interaction between politics on the one hand, and the territory of space - the geographical position of a country - on the other. Geopolitics is concerned with the analysis of geographic influences on the relationships and nature of interactions between states, their foreign policy strategies, and the global balance of power.

As a theoretical concept, geopolitics located between geography and political science is divided into *classical* and *critical geopolitics*. What is usually called “classical geopolitics” has to do with the role of geography in the international political relations and mainly focuses on the strategic goals of states. As such, classical geopolitics focuses on the state-centric and balance-of-power concept of world politics that dominated much of the 20th century (Dodds, 2000; Agnew, 2003). While “critical geopolitics” focuses on the analysis of geographic assumptions and definitions that play a role in the design of world politics (Agnew, 2003:2). For this reason, according to field researchers, critical geopolitics does not give a neutral consideration of “geographical facts” but is a deeply ideological and politicized form of analysis.

II.1. The concept of security and its evolution

Security is the basic concept in Security Studies, and also stands at the heart of International Relations. The concept of security, like the concept of peace and identity, is a very complex and constantly evolving concept, therefore it has been and is impossible to give a clear and unique definition for it. Such a concept for centuries, almost until the end of the Cold War, was seen and understood in a narrow perspective - that of protection from a foreign or external aggression and was synonymous with military power.

A broader and contemporary understanding of the concept of security, which connects it with the protection of a society values, is coined by the researcher Arnold Wolfers, according to which: “Security, in an objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values, in a subjective sense, the

absence of fear that such values will be attacked” (Wolfers, 1962:150). Of the the same opinion are other later researchers of the field, among whom there is a consensus that security means freedom from threats to essential values (Baylis, 2001&Buzan, 1983).

Following this argumentation and meaning, it can be affirmed that nowadays the concept of national security has expanded compared to its classic concept. At present, such concept is not limited simply and only to the protection of the territory and the population from an external aggression, it also has the meaning of the need to manage and cope with direct or indirect risks and threats which can potentially threaten the security of a country.

II.2. Theoretical framework

In terms of the theoretical approach, the issues related to the security of the state are better analyzed from the perspective of the realist approach, while the violation of values, rules and norms is better analyzed from the perspective of the constructivist approach. The reason for using these two theories of International Relations in this study is related to the expansion of the concept of security.

II.2.1. Realism

Realism is the oldest theory of International Relations and has the state at its center. This theory is based on two assumptions: 1. states are the main actors in the political scene and they work in an anarchic system, which means in the absence of a government or high authority that is recognized and accepted at the global level; and 2. politics is governed by the ‘law of human nature’, which is characterized by the drive for power, the desire for dominance, and selfishness or the predominance of self-interest and ambition. According to this approach, the priorities of states are security and power, which do not leave much room for morality. In the realist perspective, war is inevitable and a constant element of our nature, while ideas, ideologies and morals are irrelevant.

In the case of the interpretation of the OC phenomenon from the perspective of realism, it can be affirmed that according to this approach each member of human society has the obligation to obey the basic values of the community. For this reason, according to it, the state has the obligation to intervene (including the use of violent means) in order to maintain its social order, and that the state institutions have the obligation to maintain the operation of the legal system in force, in order for the whole society to benefit from it. As a shortcoming of the realist view, is the ignoring of the fact that in every society there are ‘social problems’ and special means are needed to treat them.



1.1.2 Constructivism

State security can find a broader explanation by using the lens of Constructivism, which presents a much more complex approach and affirms the importance of ideas, values, norms and human consciousness, and the impact they have on the interests of states and their safety.

According to the constructivist approach, political action is characterized by actors who try to identify relevant rules or norms in relation to a given situation. This logic of action is often called the “logic of appropriateness”, which according to researchers March and Olsen is a perspective that sees human action driven by rules of appropriate or exemplary behaviour, that are organized in institutions (March & Olsen, 2009). The biggest difference between realism and constructivism specifically lies in the approach to ideas - constructivism requires that the role of ideas in world politics be taken seriously, while realism completely ignores them. It is my assessment therefore that the aspect of the state’s struggle against the phenomenon of national and transnational OC can find a more comprehensive explanation through the constructivist approach, because it emphasizes social factors and the importance of the context. At its core, the constructivist approach aims to understand and explain the construction of social reality and social phenomena such as OC.

1.1.3. Definitions on organized crime

Criminality has been part and concern of the human society for a long time as a very complex, diverse and heterogeneous phenomenon. Despite the efforts for a clear definition of the term “organized crime” have never stopped, different countries and authors have had different conceptions of this notion, depending on the nature, forms, causes, types and features of the criminality appearing in these countries as well as the analysis and methodology used for this purpose. Another reason is the constant changing nature of the crime itself, which aims to adapt to the political, social and economic changes of society as well as to national and international criminal policies. In this context, the influence of geographical space, the political and economic interests of the states themselves, as well as geographical, political, social-cultural and legal differences, which increase the degree of difficulty for coining a single and clear term “organized crime”, should not be neglected. At this regard, it can be affirmed that the notion of “organized crime” is an “ambiguous and unclear concept” (Paoli, 2002).

Based on the above explanations and arguments, it can be affirmed that there is no unique model or typology of OC, but there are several of such that are based on the culture, history, tradition and criminal circumstances of the country where it operates.

In his analysis of the OC, researcher von Lampe conceptualizes the OC based on three dimensions of its nature, namely: criminal activity, criminal organization and illegal governance (von Lampe, 2015:27). According to him, the first, has to do with the existence of a number of criminal activities that are organized, due to a certain level of sophistication, continuity and rationality or a certain level of damage that it causes. The second, has to do with the existence of a form of criminal organization unlike criminals who act individually or independently. While the third, has to do with the concentration of illegal power in the hands of criminal organizations, which on the one hand create an underworld government, with the aim of controlling, regulating and taxing criminal activities and on the other hand gain influence in legal society by replacing the legitimate government or building alliances with corrupt representatives of the political and economic elites in order to manipulate the constitutional order in their favour (Ibid.).

As to the Albanian researchers of the field, Zhilla and Lamallari, when they talk about the OC, they mean two elements in defining its notion: 1. its connections with the crime world and 2. its connections with public and private institutions. According to this viewpoint, they divide the Albanian OC into two profiles: 1) OC with a low criminal profile - which includes the CGs that deal only with genuine criminal activities and 2) OC with a high profile - which include the CGs that have succeeded in creating connections not only with other CGs, but also with the political and economic elite of the country (Zhilla&Lamallari, 2015:17).

III. Security environment in Western Balkans and Albania after the '90s

III.1. Security environment in Western Balkans after the '90s

'The geographical position of the Balkan Peninsula at the crossroads between East and West, specifically between Europe and Asia, as well as Europe and the Mediterranean, has had a great impact either on the stability or instability of the region. Meanwhile, the democratic transition process that followed the fall of communism turned into a challenge for the states of the region. But this phase also coincided with the disintegration of the ex-Yugoslavia and the creation of five new states, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and the Union of Serbia & Montenegro, which were later joined by Kosovo. This disintegration process was associated with the revival of nationalist and ethnic sentiments and divisions due to populations of heterogeneous nationalities, ethnicities and religious beliefs, which led to violence and bloody civil and military conflicts during 1992-1995. A few years after the end of the war between the Serbs, Croats and Bosnians, during



the years 1997-1999, the conflict broke out in Kosovo and in 2001 in Macedonia, a situation which was exploited by the CGs to increase their illegal activities.

In addition to military conflicts, crises and political instability after the fall of communism, in economic terms, the countries of the region were in a transitional phase from a centralized economy to a free market one. Privatizations and dubious investments in the economy led to the strengthening of ties between crime and part of the political and economic elite. Researchers Buzan and Wæver have identified the weakness of state structures, as well as OC and corruption as one of the fundamental security problems of the region. According to them, “the weakness of the state structures in the Balkans region underpins a number of the security problems such as OC and corruption, which increasingly become the main obstacle to economic development and the implementation of democratic values as military conflict diminishes” (Buzan&Wæver, 2003:384).

III.2. Security environment in Albania after the '90s

Since the end of 1944 until 1990, Albania was part of the socialist camp and throughout this period it experienced severe isolation from the rest of the world, including its neighbouring countries. The fall of isolation and the opening up of Albania to the West was associated with crimes that were previously unknown to the society but also to the state officials themselves, such as trafficking in clandestine migrants and trafficking in women for prostitution and later also the trafficking in narcotics.

As a conclusion, it can be affirmed that, the communist order and the severe isolation of Albania throughout its period, the long transition, the turmoil of 1997, the lack of state authority, economic problems, unemployment and poverty, corruption and non-enforcement of the law as well as the continuous emigration not only left traces but also shaped Albania's security environment after the '90s and influenced the emerging, strengthening and sophistication of the Albanian OC inside and outside the country as well as its connection with politics and its penetration in economics.

IV. Organized crime in Western Balkans after the '90s.

IV.1. The implications of organized crime in the national security of the countries of the Western Balkans

It can be affirmed that the most important *political implications* of the OC in WB, have to do with sovereignty, i.e., the lack of recognition of state borders, which

serve as a dividing line between territories, political, social and legal systems, but also different economies and cultures. Because of its transnational nature, the OC challenges and disrespects the sovereignty and authority of the state, its political order and legal framework. By avoiding territorial control, which is one of the most important features of the state, it erodes the national sovereignty of the state. In addition to the challenge to the state, the OC aims to corrupt politics - the executive and legislative power - the judiciary and the media, with the aim of obtaining political, legal and media protection.

While the *economic implications* of the OC in WB countries are related to the stimulation of instability and economic and financial crises, distortions in the market as well as structural problems in the economy, which have a negative effect on citizens and on the stability of the country's economic and political system.

There are also implications of the OC in the *social-cultural* aspect of the WB countries through the intervention and infringement of the decent values, norms and attitudes of the citizens towards the good and legal on the one hand and the bad and illegal on the other, influencing and provoking in this way the public opinion with negative impacts on the functioning of the democratic system.

It can be affirmed that the implications of OC in the national security of WB countries have been reflected in political instability, widespread corruption and erosion of the legal economy. The membership in regional and international security organizations, bilateral and/or multilateral cooperation between and among the countries of the region themselves as well as their cooperation with the EU and the USA for the enhancement of their law enforcement capabilities and capacities as well as for building up the rule of law institutions, along with the economic progress and good governance in the Balkans, are seen as a way out for the eradication of the environment that nurtures the transnational OC operating in the region.

IV.2. The factors/causes that have influenced the emergence, development and consolidation of organized crime in the Western Balkans

The changes of political systems in the region, the disintegration and bloody conflicts with an ethnic background in the ex-Yugoslavia, specifically in Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia, the 1997 turmoil in Albania, the transition from a totalitarian system to a fragile democratic system with weak institutions, the legal vacuum during the transition period, the corrupt public administration, the rapid social and economic changes associated with political uncertainty, the fraudulent and dubious privatizations of the public economy, the favorable

geographical position between the East with opiate-producing and supplying countries, such as Afghanistan and Turkey, and the large and profitable markets for their sale in Western and Central Europe, the international feature of OC and the effects of globalization and the weak economy, are the main reasons that gave impetus to the development and consolidation of OC in the WB region.

UNODC arguments that the OC situation in the Balkans is rooted in the instability generated by the simultaneous impacts of political transition and conflict. War profiteering and unregulated privatisation led to the rapid rise of criminals with high-level political and commercial linkages (UNODC, 2008:12). Meanwhile, the Network of the Global Initiative against Transnational KO identifies and summarizes as factors of the vulnerability of OC in the Balkan region, the geographical position, the legacy of conflict, the criminalization of war, weak border control, authoritarian leadership, corruption, ethnic diversity, and disillusion among the population, especially among young people (Global Initiative, 2017: 2-5).

V. Characteristics of the organized crime in the Western Balkans

The Balkan criminal groups and networks operating in the region and beyond are believed to be often organized on basis of ethnicity and nationality. However, ethnicity and nationality are no longer the basic criteria for the creation and operation of CGs in the region. They are not necessarily the main factors that determine the strings that keep the members of a criminal organization bound together in cooperation. With the internationalization of the OC phenomenon, nationality and ethnicity, as traditional restrictions for participation in criminal organizations, are losing their importance as the basic criteria for membership in criminal organizations of today's times. It can be affirmed that in today's criminal organizations, criteria of ethnicity and nationality have been set aside, and profit maximization has come to the fore. This means that criminal cooperation often involves actors of different nationalities, ethnicities and backgrounds who come together for one purpose: to make money.

It can be affirmed that among the characteristics of WB OGCs from operating in the region and outside it are the hierarchical structure, loyalty, cooperation with other criminal groups from the region and outside it, diversity of criminal activity, violence and aggressiveness, exploitation of the fragile economical, political and security situation in the region, corruption of officials, etc.

V.1. Main types of illegal activities of the organized crime in Western Balkans

Some of the main criminal activities in which the OCGs in WB are involved in are the production, sale and trafficking in narcotics, trafficking in weapons and human beings, smuggling in migrants, money laundering, etc.

The *narcotics trafficking* is the main and most profitable activity of the regional CGs. In this context, it is worth noting that one of the main routes for the trafficking of opiates, mainly heroin, from Afghanistan to Europe is the so-called “Balkan route”. The UNODC report published on 26.11.2015 defines the “Balkan route” as their main conduit for the Afghan opiates to Europe, through the Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkey, the countries of South-Eastern Europe, which are mainly transit countries, and the countries of Central and Western Europe, which are the destination countries (UNODC, 2015:19-20). This report lists 32 countries and territories that transport and supply heroin via the Balkan route (Ibid.). The fact of the importance of the Balkan route in opiate trafficking is also evidenced by the Europol “SOCTA 2017” report, which underlines that “the Balkan route remains the main entry route for heroin trafficking in the EU” (Europol, 2017:38). Regarding the cocaine trafficking along the Balkan route to the markets of Western and Central Europe, the amount is much lower compared to heroin. Another type of drug that is trafficked from the region is cannabis (*cannabis sativa*), which is grown in the region, mainly in Albania, and partially in Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia.

Part of the portfolio of the criminal activities of the region CGs is the *firearms trafficking*, which mainly come from the stockpiles of weapons created in these countries after the end of the Cold War, from conflicts in the ex-Yugoslavia or from lootings of military warehouses, like in happened Albania in ‘97. This type of criminal activity is mainly a supplementary but not primary source of income for the CGs. According to Europol, the OCGs involved in firearms trafficking in the EU and the firearms smuggled mainly come from WB and the former Soviet Union (Europol 2013:31).

Another remit of criminal activity of OCGs in WB is the *migrant smuggling*, an activity that marked a sharp increase during the refugee crisis in 2014-2015. The activity of the CGs in the Balkan region “contributes to the illegal activity of human trafficking in the EU that has flourished together with the migration crisis towards the continent. Such business, according to to a report from Interpol, generated 5 to 6 billion euros in revenue last year [2015]” (Financial Times, 2016).

Money laundering is another important activity of the region’s CGs, which also marks the final stage of a criminal activity. The existence of the informal economy based mainly on the circulation of physical money (cash), along with the high level



of corruption, weak law enforcement as well as the corrupt judiciary are some of the motivating factors for individuals and CGs in the Balkan region to invest the proceeds of crime in a legal economy. According to the Europol report, “money laundering also takes place in this region through investments in real estate and commercial companies” (Europol, 2013:12).

VI. The organized crime in Albania after the '90s

VI.1. Implications of the organized crime in Albania's national security

Being part of WB, the implications of OC in our country are very similar to those in other countries of the region. Considering that OC aims to be involved in the political, economic and social-cultural environments of the country, it also has its implications in the political, economic and social-cultural fields in Albania. Regarding its political implications, it can be asserted that the OC in Albania is involved in illegal national and transnational activities, and consequently it does not recognize the authority (violates the laws) and sovereignty (borders) of the state [Albania] and tries to challenge or use the state for its own mere illegal interests. Furthermore, the OC in Albania aims to penetrate the political power, both the executive and legislative, with the aim of facilitating the fulfillment of its objectives that are related to financial gain, the expansion of criminal activity and the avoidance of legal punishment.

But the Albanian OC does not only aim at politics, but also aim at capturing the country's judiciary, prosecution and security institutions, by using corruption and threats as means to achieve this goal. The process of re-evaluation of judges and prosecutors alone, or otherwise known as the “vetting process”, has revealed the high degree of corruption that exists among the representatives of justice, their ties to crime and the favours made to crime in return for the latter's bribes or protection. Most of the dismissals of judges and prosecutors were made for unjustified wealth, but there is also a part of them dismissed for suspicious ties and contacts to crime.

As far as the implications of OC in the Albanian economy are concerned, they are related to the criminal activities that are directed against the national economic system and its normal and legal functioning. In parallel with their illegal activity, the Albanian CGs aim to be involved in the legal economy with the aim of not only laundering the profits generated by their illegal activities and injecting those profits into the legal economy, but also increasing their income.

With regard to the social-cultural aspects in Albania, such implications are reflected in the connection between cultural, social environment and crime, their impact on criminal behavior but also the impact and serious consequences that

crime has in the society and the way society reacts to the crime. When talking about these implications, it means the influence and distortion of the decent values, norms and attitudes of the citizens towards the good and legal on the one hand and the bad and illegal on the other.

In case of an assessment of the risks and threats that Albania faces, OC and corruption can be identified as serious risks and threats to its security. It can be affirmed that a major and strategic objective of Albania should be the membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures, i.e. an objective that is partially met at present with NATO membership but still remains unaccomplished in terms of EU membership.

VI.2. The factors/causes that have influenced the emergence, development and consolidation of organized crime in Albania

Like the implications of OC, the factors that promote OC are mainly of a political, social and economic nature. These factors and various circumstances, either alone or combined with each other, have served as incentives for the emergence of early forms of organized criminal activities, as well as later in the evolution and sophistication of criminal organizations. The two field researchers, Zhilla and Lamallari, single out a number of factors that have influenced the emergence, development and consolidation of the OC in Albania, such as: the transition from a totalitarian regime with stringent criminal policy to a fragile democratic system with weak institutions; the chaotic situation caused in 1997 by the collapse of pyramid firms and the looting of weapons from the army and police depots; endemic corruption in law enforcement agencies; favourable geographical position with drug-producing and supplier countries such as Afghanistan and Turkey in the East, and high-consumption countries in the West; the international nature of OC and the impact of globalization; weak economy; the dismantling of social structures, adversely affecting the family as the society's nucleus; the high rate of migration and the import of criminal experiences and connections obtained abroad, etc. (Zhilla&Lamallari, 2015:7).

VI.3. The characteristics of the organized crime in Albania

The change of the political system, from the communist and isolated to the democratic one with the market economy, was associated with the emergence of a number of problematics and phenomena that had not been encountered before. The economic collapse, the high level of unemployment and poverty, as well as the quick thirst for enrichment, even illegally, led to an increase in the intensity of criminal activity and the creation of OCGs. During 1990-1997, hierarchical

criminal structures appeared in Albania in the form of armed gangs, criminal organizations and structured criminal groups (Zhill&Lamallari, 2015). Their main activities were related to human trafficking, trafficking in women for prostitution, kidnapping and extortion. Armed gangs were strengthened and spread almost throughout the country during the crisis of 1997, where murders, thefts, robberies and extortions flourished, comprised the main part of their criminal activity. According to a report of the European Committee on Criminal Problems, during 1999, some 25 to 100 criminal groups were active in Albania with a total of 500 to 2,500 members (CDPC, 2000).

It was the time when the Albanian CGs gained a bad reputation for the danger they posed not only inside the Albanian territory but also abroad. According to the researcher of the field Arsovska, "By 1999, as a result of the activities of some Albanian criminal groups and the great deal of international attention these groups received, Albanian criminals were considered to be a dangerous breed, posing a significant threat to Western society (Arsovska, 2015:78). In these years, not only we talk about the strengthening and consolidation of the Albanian OC, but the term "Albanian mafia" began to be used, especially for the Albanian crime operating in Italy, but not alone. Some researchers started considering the "Albanian mafia" as the most powerful among other mafias of foreign origin operating in Italy (Jamieson&Silj, 1998).

According to the researchers Zhill and Lamallari, by 2005 and onwards, the criminal network appears as the most widespread and suitable form to undertake various criminal activities. This includes the trafficking in various types of drugs, weapons and ammunition, migrant smuggling and organized cybercrime (Zhill&Lamallari, 2015). The same researchers argue that Albanian CGs are mostly involved in the narcotics trafficking, mainly of cannabis, but also hard drugs such as heroin and cocaine, towards neighboring countries, with EU countries as final destination. Regarding the most concerning activities of this time within Albania, the same researchers single out fines against businesses, use of explosives, murders committed by contracted killers or by "unidentified perpetrators", with the aim of eliminating the rivals for "rebalancing the market", or for terror purposes (Ibid.).

Furthermore, it can be affirmed that today's Albanian CGs try to adapt themselves to the new reality, and adopt their activities in accordance with the new market requirements, tending more and more towards a entrepreneurial model. This finding is also supported by the researcher Arsovska, according to whom "in various parts of Western Europe, the traditional homogeneous, hierarchical, violent, and impenetrable Albanian CGs seem to be giving way to a more conventional business model" (Arsovska, 2015:101).

VI.4. Types of illegal activities of the Albanian organized crime

The illegal activities undertaken by the Albanian CGs are very similar to those of other CGs in the region, with the cultivation of narcotic plants, the production, narcotics sale and trafficking, trafficking in weapons and human beings, organized burglaries, money laundering, smuggling of Albanian citizens and migrants, etc, as their leading activities.

The main activity of the Albanian OCG is the *cultivation of narcotic plants* and *narcotics sale and trafficking*. Cultivation of narcotic plants, mainly cannabis (*cannabis sativa*), dates back to the change of political order, the fall of isolation and the opening of Albania to the world, which were associated with new and unknown criminal phenomena, including the cultivation of narcotic plants. This type of criminal activity gained alarming proportions, especially by 1997 and onwards. The tolerance to the open cultivation of cannabis in the village of Lazarat, Gjirokastra district, led to favourable conditions for the CGs, who, for more than a decade, managed to consolidate finances, networks, markets and political connections. According to the Italian finance police, the Guardia-di-Finanza, the annual income from cannabis grown in Lazarat alone was about 6 billion USD, or about half of Albania's overall GDP (Likmeta, 2013).

Another activity of the Albanian CGs is the trafficking in narcotics, specifically cannabis, heroin and cocaine. Located in the Balkan region, Albania is naturally part of the "Balkan route" of heroin trafficking from Asia and the Middle East towards Western Europe. As a result, the Albanian CGs are involved in this profitable activity where "in cooperation with the Turkish CGs, they transport the heroin to Albania through Macedonia, continue to Italy by sea and by land to Greece, as well as in the Northern Balkans. The final destination of heroin shipments remains Western, Central Europe and the Nordic countries" (Zhill&Lamallari, 2015:32-33).

The cocaine trafficking is also one of the most profitable activities of Albanian CGs, who use the territory of our country to transit loads of cocaine (UNODC, 2013:44). The analysis carried out by the police of several EU countries, shows that starting from 2010, the Albanian and/or Albanian-speaking OC, in addition to controlling the distribution of hard drugs, was increasingly involved in the international shipments of cocaine from Latin America to Western European countries.

Among the criminal activities that originated with the opening of Albania to the West is also the *trafficking in human beings*, mainly of women for sexual exploitation and minors for forced labor (begging, etc.) to Italy, Greece and other European countries. Trafficking and exploitation of women for prostitution was

one of the main activities of the Albanian CGs in the 90s, not only because of the significant income this activity generated, but also “because it did not require large investments or capital” (Arsovska , 2015:94).

Trafficking in firearms and ammunition is another activity of the Albanian CGs parallel to trafficking in narcotics, human beings and the smuggling of migrants and various goods (Zhillia and Lamallari, 2015:64). Such activity flourished especially during 1997, when the collapse of pyramid schemes was associated with the collapse of the state itself, with the CGs taking control of the country's territory. During this period, police stations and military depots were attacked and looted, among others. According to a UNDP report, more than 550,000 small arms and light weapons, 839 million rounds of ammunition and 16 million explosive devices were stolen from military depots (Khakee&Florquin, 2003). A part of the stolen weaponry and ammunition was smuggled to neighboring countries by the CGs not only in 1997 alone but also during the following years. According to researchers Zhillia and Lamallari, nowadays this kind of trafficking exists in the form of the import from Montenegro and Kosovo of different types of handguns (Zhillia&Lamallari, 2015:69).

The organized burglaries of private homes in EU countries by CGs comprised of Albanian citizens is a crime that has existed for a long time, but in recent years it has become a real concern, especially with regard to the negative impact, panic and uncertainty it causes to the local communities in these countries. This criminal activity is carried out by more than one individual, often in by an OCG, and deal with the theft of properties, even with use of violence/weapons, smuggling and recycling of stolen items, and their conversion into financial assets. As a result, in order to intensify the cooperation with the counterpart police organizations of the affected countries, as well as with the aim of combating this criminal activity, the Task Force Anti-Skifter was established in October 2017 at the Albanian State Police.

Part of the range of criminal activities of the Albanian CGs is definitely *the money laundering*, which marks the end of the cycle of a criminal activity that has to do with the recycling of proceeds of crime with the purpose of injecting them in the legal economy. Such money is circulated and reinvested especially in the construction and real estate sector, but also in new businesses or the purchase of existing businesses. This kind of criminal activity finds a fertile ground in Albania as “the large size of the informal economy, combined with the still widespread use of cash, constitutes a significant money laundering vulnerability” (Moneyval, 2018:6).

Another activity of the Albanian CGs, that has taken place over the years, is the *smuggling of Albanian citizens and foreign migrants*. This activity saw a significant growth during the 1990-2000 decade, which coincided with the fall of isolation and

the opening of Albania to the West, as well as the crisis of 1997. But such activity marked a drastic decline after 2010, due to the lifting of the visa regime with the EU. But by 2015 and onwards, an increase in the cases of migrant smuggling from Asia, the Middle East and North Africa towards the countries of Western Europe is seen. To prevent and combat such a phenomenon, Frontex teams (around 50 officers) have been deployed in Albania, and cooperate with the Albanian Border and Migration Police (Frontex, 2019).

VII. National policies and strategies on the fight against the organized crime in Western Balkans and Albania

VII.1. Policies and strategies of the Western Balkan countries on the fight against the organized crime

About three decades after the end of the Cold War, the fall of the communist system and more than 20 years after the end of the Kosovo war, which was the last in the ordeal of wars in the ex-Yugoslavia that led to its dissolution, the assessment is that the security in the region is more consolidated in the sense of the absence of the possibility of a major immediate threat from a widespread and armed conflict (Anastasijevic, 2006). Although the security vacuum caused by the dissolution of the ex-Yugoslavia has been filled, the reminiscence of previous conflicts foster distrust in the relations and cooperation between some of the states in the region, especially between Serbia and Croatia as well as Serbia and Kosovo.

The literature review shows that all WB countries have adopted national security strategies or defense strategies as well as sectoral strategies in terms of the fight against risks and threats to their national security, including OC. All these strategic documents of the WB countries have identified OC as a serious threat to their national security, public safety, democratic institutions, financial and economic stability. Some of these countries have NSSs in force, approved since the last decade, while some others have more updated ones approved this decade.

VII.2. Policies and strategies of Albania on the fight against the organized crime

Like the other WB countries, Albania has adopted national security strategies as well as sectoral strategies in terms of the fight against risks and threats to its national security, including OC. In both of these strategic documents, OC is identified as a serious threat to the country's national security, public safety, democratic institutions, financial and economic stability. More specifically, the updated NSS,

as the “fundamental planning document for the national security of the Republic of Albania”, was approved in 2014. This document points out the interconnected and interdependent nature of national security risks and threats, highlighting that “security of Republic of Albania is affected by a combination of traditional and non-traditional risks, originating from internal and external factors” (Albania’s NSS, 2014:3). In the non-traditional internal risks, the document includes OC, corruption, terrorism and WMD risks to the economic, political order and good governance, while in the external ones it includes the risks caused as a result of the activities of international criminal organizations, terrorist groups, the strengthening of non-state actors, as well as global climate and demographic changes.

The Albania’s NSS makes an assessment of the external (global and regional) and internal security environment. In the global security environment, it notes the largely asymmetric and hybrid nature of future risks, and identifies state, non-state actors or failed states as their generators.

Assessing the internal security environment, among other risks, corruption and OC, expressed in the forms of drug, firearm, ammunition and human trafficking, are identified by the NSS as serious national security risks (Ibid.: 20).

In today’s globalisation period where the borders have ‘melted’, in order for Albania to be successful in the fight against national and transnational OC, the strategies and efforts for their implementation must be coordinated with those of neighboring countries, regional or international security organizations. This is because the success of a single country relatively depends on the success of others, given that regional and international cooperation is the only effective means of fighting transnational OC.

VIII. Conclusions

As pointed out in the paper, national and transnational OC today constitutes one of the most serious risks and challenges to the national security of Albania and WB countries. This is primarily due to the geographical position of the region, which is located in the transiting corridor of the narcotics, migrant trafficking and smuggling, refugees and victims of trafficking, mainly originating from Asia and the Middle East heading for the Western Europe, as well as the proximity to risks stemming from the destabilizing situation in the Middle East and North Africa. Secondly, due to the problems of the region itself, which are reflected in the existence of criminal groups in the region and the cooperation between them, as well as the existence of weak governing structures, corruption of state officials and porous borders.

With regard to the overall current security situation in WB, it can be asserted that it has improved in terms of the low probability of an armed conflict in the region. This paradigm is reinforced by the deployment of NATO peacekeeping forces in the region, such as SFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina and KFOR in Kosovo, as well as the UN forces, such as UNMIK in Kosovo, but also by the membership of most of the region's states in the international and regional security organizations and institutions such as NATO, Adriatic Charter 5, SEDM, SEPCA, SELEC, but also the political ones such as the Berlin Process, the Regional Cooperation Council, etc. A little wider in the region, we have Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Romania, and Slovenia, as member of EU countries, which together with Albania and Montenegro are also members of NATO. In addition, we have Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Albania as aspiring countries that are at different stages in the EU accession and membership process.

Following this reasoning, it can be asserted that Albania is not threatened by any conventional threat, such as armed aggression, but the main threats to its security are the non-conventional ones, specifically OC, corruption and terrorism.

Based on the review and analysis made in this paper, it can be concluded that the implications of OC in the national security of Albania and other WB countries are reflected in political instability, widespread corruption and the erosion of the legal economy. To remedy the problems caused by OC, suggestions and recommendations include the reformation of the political and judicial systems, the strengthening of the rule of law, the drafting and courageous implementation of concrete and cross-sectoral strategies on the fight against OC and corruption, money laundering, informal economy, illegal trafficking, smuggling and other criminal activities in the economic remit, the drafting of serious and friendly policies for the attraction of serious foreign and domestic investments in the economy, membership in regional and international security initiatives and organizations, strengthening and intensification of cooperation bilateral and/or multilateral political, economic and security with the regional countries as well as with the EU and the USA for better training, better equipment and enhancement of capabilities and capacities of their law enforcement agencies as well as to help build the institutions of the rule of law, economic progress and good governance in Albania and WB.

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Erasmus Programme as an Instrument of EU Public Diplomacy _____

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Abstract

Erasmus + Programme can be considered an instrument of soft power in countries that aspire to become EU member states. The core assumption is that due to people-to-people contacts, Erasmus participants are most likely to become informal ambassadors of the EU, in the sense that they become bearers of the EU's soft power, leading to changes in cultural perceptions and social. However, what will be the place of Erasmus in the ongoing debate on the strategy of enhancing the image of the EU? Erasmus can play a major role in this new strategy, considering the huge increase in mobility flows between EU countries and those waiting to become members. Moreover, the EU institutions are looking for new strategic tools of public diplomacy. This paper aims to test the following hypothesis: Erasmus, as an instrument of public diplomacy, affects the growth of the image of the EU in Albania. Therefore, this paper is of great interest because it is closely related to the debate on the means and goals of the EU's foreign policy and its influence on the member countries, especially Albania. It reaches the conclusion that Erasmus, as an instrument of public diplomacy, serves to increase the image of the EU, since it is a tool of soft power of the EU.

Key words: *public diplomacy, soft power, influence, EU strategy.*

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I. Introduction: Erasmus + and Soft power

One presents soft power in “Bound to Lead” 1990, as an indirect way of exercising power, which stands in contrast to the command method of exercising power, which relies on inducements or threats (Nye. 1990, p. 31). He seeks to gain support through attraction rather than force. Hard command power aims to get others to do what you want. The aim of soft power is more subtle, it is to get others to want what you want. In this sense, it is somewhat similar to Galbraith’s mention of conditioned power (the result of persuasion, but it cannot be clear) and compensatory and attractive forms of power in *Anatomy of Power* (Galbraith, 1983).

Soft power is a less coercive, less tangible form of power, the results of which are also less ascertainable, but do not carry the stigma of coercion or intimidation. The essence of soft power lies, according to Nye, in coercive capabilities. of communication, the use of multilateral institutions and the effective manipulation of interdependence.

If hard power relies on traditional concrete instruments such as military threats and economic incentives, soft power has at its disposal a much wider, albeit more elusive, set of resources. According to Nye, a country’s soft power rests mainly on three sources: its culture (the country’s attractiveness to others), its political values, and its external policies (legal entities and moral authority).

Soft power is primarily a communication skill, and as such it does not only depend on the strength of the message, but also on the talent of the transmitter and the disposition of the receiver. This is more volatile than traditional hard power and its effects are harder to predict or measure. It is more effective in creating general influence than in producing a specific easily observable action, more suitable for pursuing the goals of the environment (Nye. 1990, p. 16) (i.e. creating desirable environments, favorable to a person’s ultimate goals), than with that of goals specific pursuits of “possession” (eg. specific pursuits aimed at protecting or increasing tangible assets) these remain the most difficult forms of power (Wolfers, 1962 p. 86). In “The Goals of Foreign Policy” (1961) where he introduces the distinction, Wolfers goes on to make an interesting observation regarding the goals of the environment. According to Wolfers (1962), if such goals did not exist, peace could never become an objective of national policy. By its very nature, peace cannot be the property of any nation. Similarly, efforts to promote international law or to create international organizations are addressed to the environments in which nations operate, and their real efforts only make sense if nations have reason to worry about major things other than their wealth (Wolfers, 1962 p. 74).

Erasmus+ is the new Program of the European Commission, created to support

education, training, youth, sports, as well as the exchange of students, academic staff and administration in Europe for the period 2014-2020. It is estimated that since the start of Erasmus+ (2014), over 2 million people have participated in the program. Its budget of €14.7 billion offers opportunities for over 4 million Europeans to study, train, gain experience and volunteer abroad. Its implementation is carried out by the Education, Media and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) in Brussels, National Agencies (NAs) of each Program country and Erasmus National Offices, available in all partner countries, including Albania.

Erasmus+ plays a key role in Higher Education Institutions because it provides and finances the exchange of students, academic staff and administration, as well as scholarships for joint Masters in the best universities of the countries participating in the program. In 2016, Erasmus+ supported 21,000 projects among 79,000 organizations in partner countries. 725,000 people went abroad to study, train, teach, volunteer with the support or funding provided through the Erasmus+ 2016 call.

The University of Tirana signed 33 ICM (International Credit Mobility) agreements in the 2014-2016 academic years. Whereas, in the 2016-2017 academic year, 56 new active agreements and 42 ICM agreements were signed. Erasmus+ Office Albania is a reference center for the processing, promotion and distribution of information and documentation of the Erasmus+ Program to Higher Education Institutions in Albania and to all applicants or interested parties.

Albanian institutions can apply either as an applicant and partner or simply as a project partner. Albanian institutions applying for Erasmus+ must be registered and have the PIC code (Participant Identification Code).

According to Erasmus+ Office Albania, the beneficiaries of the Erasmus+ program are: 165 students, 57 teaching staff, 28 administrative staff. The mobility period can vary from 3 to 12 months for Bachelor, Master and PhD students, meanwhile for teaching and administrative staff from 5 days to 2 months. Depending on the project and its conditions, public and private higher education institutions can apply as applicants (coordinators) or as partners. Non-profit organizations operating in the field of education, business, chamber of commerce, etc., can also apply as partners (according to the conditions of the respective projects).

At the end of the evaluation process of Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education Call 2017, there were 2 projects with an Albanian Coordinator and 4 projects with selected Albanian partners. In general, 15 Albanian universities and 3 non-university partners have benefited from the selected projects. Despite the benefits, Albania is the only country that does not have a law on scientific and research activity, coherent with new developments. The new Law on Science, Technology and Innovation is expected to reform the legal framework left from 1994. This is a disadvantage compared to other countries in the region. In 2016

with Executive Order No. 298 dated 01.06.2016 was created by the Minister of Education and Sports, the Working Group for the Drafting of the Law on Science and Technological Development³, the process is still ongoing. There are many delays in the process of completing the legal framework by drafting by-laws - for example Law no. 80/2015 on Higher Education has taken a long period of more than 3 years to complete.

With new legal developments, it is intended to curb a negative phenomenon such as brain drain. Albania has experienced a massive “brain drain” and a collapse of its research infrastructure structures. According to a recent study by UNDP, it was estimated that “there should be at least 2,500 Albanian doctorates and doctoral candidates in developed OECD countries”. For a small country like Albania, this group of researchers is not insignificant and represents about 40% of Albanians who have a doctorate and is estimated to be more than 25% of the country’s academic potential. This ever-growing reservoir of Albanian “brains” can and should be mobilized for the benefit of the socio-economic development of the country, especially if specific conditions exist (Gëdeshi & King, 2018).

Since 1992, the Tempus program opened the door to the European academic community and offered Albanian educators opportunities to connect with their counterparts in the region and in Europe. Tempus is the European Union program that supports the modernization of higher education in the area around the EU. All Albanian public universities and some private ones have participated in 141 Tempus projects in total. The total Tempus budget that Albania has benefited from since 1992 is 36.75 million Euros.

Two general long-term processes, the Stabilization-Association Agreement and the construction of the European Higher Education Area, have shaped the Tempus cooperation in Albania since 2000, and the dynamics of both have led to the updating of higher education priorities on an annual basis.

II. Literature review

The somewhat vague term “public diplomacy” entered the foreign affairs lexicon in the 1960s to describe aspects of international relations other than traditional diplomacy. Whereas conventional diplomacy is limited to more or less visible contacts between governments, whether in the form of a direct communication between leaders, or through official representatives of the administrations involved, determines the exchanges that take place between the government of a country and the general public between the leader of the opinions of the mass audience (Potter. E, 2009p. 48-49).

The first use of the term in its more or less modern sense is attributed to Edmund Gullion, a retired foreign service officer and dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, who founded the Center for Public Diplomacy Edward R. Murrow in 1965. Nicholas Cull, in his article “Public Diplomacy”, before Gullion with “Evolution of a Phrase”, cites an early pamphlet from the Murrow Center, which summarizes Gullion’s concept. According to Gullion, public diplomacy deals with influencing public attitudes, forming and the execution of foreign policies. Including the dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy, the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries, the relationship between foreign affairs and politics, communication between diplomats and foreign correspondents and the process of intercultural communications (Cull. N, 2009 pg. 23-27).

Gullion and Center Murrow may have been the first to use the term Public Diplomacy, but they were not the last to try to define it. Even today, despite the widespread use of the term, except for the ones that have generated dozens of institutions and centers, no one can give a single definition.

The USC Center for Public Diplomacy (United States Center) distances itself from the narrowest interpretations of this term, and formally acknowledges the role of public diplomacy as an instrument of high power, while writing that traditional definitions of public diplomacy include government-sponsored cultural, educational, and informational programs, citizen-to-citizen exchanges, and broadcasts used to promote a country’s national interest through understanding, informing, and influencing foreign audiences. In addition to government sponsored programs. The center is equally interested in what CPD (Center for Public Diplomacy) board member Joseph Nye has labeled “soft power.” The center studies the impact of private activities, from popular culture to fashion to sports and until the news on the Internet. They inevitably, if not intentionally, have an impact on foreign policy and national security, as well as on trade, tourism and other national interests. Additionally, the center’s research interests are not limited to US government activities, as they examine public diplomacy, which concerns a wide range of institutions and governments around the globe. For the study of public diplomacy as an expanding field, there are no agreed-upon definitions. However, it can be argued that public diplomacy is, at its core, a very old idea.

III. Methodology

By means of this work, we will try to show to what extent and how the Erasmus program works as an instrument of public diplomacy, namely in increasing the image of the EU in Albania. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to find a

connection between Erasmus and the image of the EU in Albania. In arguing that this is an appropriate, justifiable and good choice, it was taken into consideration: the interest of future participants in the program, and how it will contribute to the continuous improvement of the program and the values that the EU has in our country; the existence of previous works on this topic, by researchers and researchers in the field of diplomacy, articles, reports, etc; and the works on this topic, or parts, or special aspects of it, had their value and importance as reference sources.

In these works, it is established how other researchers have made the connection between Erasmus and the image of the EU an object of study, how they have proceeded methodologically to process concepts, variables, whether these are dependent or independent, etc.

Based on the above objectives, this paper aims to test the following hypothesis: Erasmus, as an instrument of public diplomacy, affects the growth of the image of the EU in Albania.

A questionnaire was used to obtain the results for this study. Erasmus participants were recruited through national Erasmus+ offices, which agreed to forward standardized emails. However, the Erasmus participants involved were mainly alumni, those who had returned from abroad. From one point of view, this can be seen as a limitation of the survey, as one could argue that these individuals are more likely to have joined the EU. However, it is also possible to argue that the individuals surveyed were the most suitable for the purpose of this paper, as they are expected to be more aware of the EU's functions and processes and, thus, are in a better position. to provide reliable answers that can lead to results.

The questionnaire is standard and identical for all students involved in the study. The questions used in the survey come from Eurobarometer. The distribution of the questionnaires was done via e-mail. Questionnaires were distributed to 100 students who represent 6 countries in which they studied, during the months of June and July 2020.

In the questionnaires, different aspects such as age, gender, education and experience were taken into consideration. Regarding the survey, 100 people representing 6 countries participated. The results of the survey were generally as expected. The results are consistent with the results of an Erasmus impact study for 2013: "...in all regions, Erasmus students feel significantly more connected to Europe than those who have not been part" (European Commission, 2014b, page 3). Moreover, "...more than 80% feel that their European attitude has been strengthened by mobility and this perception is particularly strong in Southern and Eastern Europe (85% each)" (European Commission, 2014b, p. 3).

However, the study of Erasmus impact only addressed EU citizens as at that time Erasmus was still a program within EU mobility.

From the study, 92% of respondents feel closer to EU values after the Erasmus experience (P3).

Question 1: How often would you say you discuss EU policies?

	Often (%)	Occasionally (%)	Never (%)
Answers (%)	23.53%	76.47%	0%

Question 2: The three most important personal values

Values according to EU youth (in order of importance)	Values according to Erasmus Albanian youth (in order of importance)
1. Rule of Law	1. The respect of human rights
2. The respect of human rights	2. Rule of Law
3. Individual freedom	3. Individual freedom

Question 4: How close do you feel to the EU?

	Very close	Close	Not very close	Not at all	I don't know
Answer (%)	38.89%	47.22%	8.33%	2.78%	2.78%

Question 5: How likely is our country to join the EU one day?

	It is very likely	Likely	Not likely	Impossible
Answer (%)	18.75%	12.5%	18.75%	50%

IV. Findings

It is important to consider how improved public diplomacy will contribute to better explaining the EU's policy rationale and the positive impact of concrete EU actions. The international dimension of Erasmus as an instrument of public diplomacy in improving the image of the EU should be taken into consideration.

Even if the work focuses mainly on the main action (i.e., the movement of students to study abroad), it is interesting to combine all the main actions of Erasmus with elements of public diplomacy according to Kull's theory.

Regarding the data analysis, the first set of four questions aims to assess EU soft power through indicators of EU attraction, EU affiliation and EU preferences. For this purpose, each question starts with the following formula: After studying / training in an EU country, to measure the impact that the experience in the EU

had on the respondents. Not surprisingly, more than 90 % strongly agree or tend to agree that they are now more interested in certain topics, such as national and European identity, multi-culturalism and European cultures, EU perspectives- of, and policies (Q 2).

Moreover, they feel closer to the EU's fundamental values, such as human rights, gender equality, democracy, freedom of expression and the rule of law, and they are more open to cultural and linguistic diversity (Q 3). Finally, they would like their country to deepen relations with the EU (Q 4).

Only the question about EU membership (Q 5) did not reach 90% but 81%. This is understandable, considering the sensitivity of the question. The second set of questions aims to assess the changes in cultural and social perceptions experienced by Erasmus participants. These changes were measured through the following indicators: tolerance, respect for other cultures and the development of intercultural skills.

The questionnaire starts with the formula, thanks to my experience abroad, in order to measure the causal link between the Erasmus experience and the changes. Also, for this set of questions, more than 90% strongly agree or tend to agree with the formulated statements. In particular, thanks to the experience abroad, they can better tolerate the behavior and values of other individuals without compromising their own values (Q 6).

Also, they feel more comfortable if they are confronted with different values and ways of life of other people (Q 7). They feel more tolerant and respectful towards other cultures (Q 8). Furthermore, they learned how to interact with people of different nations and became more open to cultural issues about foreigners (Q 9). Finally, they have a positive social and cultural perception of other people with different backgrounds than theirs (Q 10).

The survey results describe a broad consensus on two main issues. First, students returning from Erasmus feel more attracted to the EU after the Erasmus experience. Second, the experience of mobility had a positive impact on the perception of others. In fact, the results of the Erasmus impact study in 2013 have been confirmed with higher scores among Erasmus students. About 90% of Erasmus participants feel more interested in EU politics. In fact, everyone talks about EU politics often or occasionally.

This evidence is sufficient to assume that Erasmus participants are likely to become informal EU ambassadors for the simple reason that they talk more about the EU than their fellow citizens do. In the second question, it asks about their three most important personal values. This question, taken from the standard Eurobarometer 84, aims to assess the eventual difference between the most important values for Erasmus participants and EU citizens. Based on the survey, the values are almost the same, namely the rule of law and human rights.

The fourth question, also from the standard Eurobarometer 84, aims to measure their belonging to the EU. Erasmus participants feel even more connected to the EU than EU citizens themselves. In other words, Europeans value the EU less than non-Europeans (European Commission, 2014b). This phenomenon deserves deeper research that is outside the scope of this work. However, as far as this work is concerned, the main finding is that the degree of belonging to the EU among Erasmus participants is high and this makes them bearers of the EU's soft power. The fifth question is not answered by any Eurobarometer. In fact, the reason behind it is not to compare the results with the opinions of EU citizens, but to see to what extent the experience of moving to the EU has influenced the Erasmus participants.

Regarding the survey, 50% of the respondents think that it is impossible for our country to join the EU and about 19% that it is not likely. This shows that Erasmus participants see integration as impossible in the current conditions. This is very interesting, as we are much closer to the borders of the EU and it is seen as an impossibility to be within the borders.

If we go by the results of the European Commission, Georgia, located in the Caucasus region between Turkey and Russia, seems to be among the most attracted by the EU. This Georgian enthusiasm is confirmed by the 2016 annual survey report of the Eastern Partnership countries, which states that "Georgia is the country most positively oriented towards the EU" (European Commission 2016e, p. 12).

V. Discussion

V.1 Public Diplomacy in the European context

This rather broad definition captures the essence of EU internal and external public diplomacy. Basically, it is about the image that a certain actor intends to project to a third party (European Commission, 2007 p. 12). EU public diplomacy is complicated by the imprecise nature of the EU's overall activity, or, more simply, the type of actor the EU wants to become on the international stage (Rasmussen S. 2009). This is partly due to the fact that the EU is an ongoing project, lacking completion, but it can also be rooted in a wider existential crisis of the struggle over who and what the EU is on the global stage. One of the complicated factors when considering the EU's public diplomacy is that, historically, it has been largely internally directed. The essence of this was captured in the action plan of the European Commission to improve "Europe's communication" with citizens, by means of which it creates a relationship and starts a dialogue with European citizens, listens carefully and connects with people. It is not a neutral exercise without value, it is an essential part of the political process (European Commission, 2005 pg. 2).

In the case of the EU, the internal aspects of public diplomacy are part of the identity construction and narratives used externally. As a result, distinctions between the internal and external aspects of public diplomacy have become increasingly difficult to maintain, especially in a saturated media environment where domestic and foreign audiences have equal access to official information.

The complex relationship between the internal and external dimensions of EU public diplomacy is perhaps best thought of as a process of self-reaffirmation, whereby messages communicated internally are also directed externally as part of the construction of internal to the identity of the Union. Many issues, such as the sovereign debt crisis in the eurozone, present coordination challenges for the internal and external aspects of public diplomacy (the latter has received little attention). This fusion of internal and external aspects of policies has also been described as mediating (which combines the international and internal aspects of a policy or issue), which applies with special force to the public diplomacy of the EU (Huijgh, 2011p.63) . The international projection of the EU relies heavily on the promotion of the “Union” as exemplary - “you can be like us too”. This is the core idea of attraction “postmodern” Europe, which is based on the assumption that external partners in the premodern and modern world will somehow want to emulate peace, stability and prosperity of EU members, which is characteristic of post-modernism (Cooper, 2003).

The legitimacy of internal identity construction, acceptance of norms and consensus around the narrative will do much to determine the legitimacy of external public diplomacy, both for EU citizens (who wish to see their own reflections) and for third parties (who wish to see the virtues of the European example reflected upon themselves). According to this logic, if the EU promotes itself as a paragon of peaceful coexistence, or an area of “human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights”, it must be seen from within and diplomacy public externality will appear firmly embedded in society (Ferrero-Waldner, 2006-9). This notion is strengthened by the Treaty on the European Union, which is even clearer about external objectives and principles than internal aspects (Article 3(5) the Lisbon Treaty).

The main external messages are either focused on exporting the EU ‘model’, which includes its normative values and principles or, for more specific issues, often takes the form of info politics (Gouveia P. & Plumridge H., 2005 p. 8 -9). The idea of transferring information, either passively (through websites, blogs or publications) or actively (by official visits of EU officials or through the activities of local EU delegation staff) is still alive, and surprisingly with little reference to public diplomacy itself. The nature of EU public diplomacy is particularly difficult to dissect when considering that the EU has no less than 164 national missions accredited to the EU and 36 international organizations and other representations,



making it one of the most major diplomatic events at the global level². The first stop in terms of the external dimensions of EU public diplomacy is Brussels itself. The EEAS (External Action of the European Union) has made considerable efforts to engage with the international press based in Brussels, many of which are directed towards the Member States themselves.

V.2 Erasmus and the image of the European Union

The EU's Erasmus program represents a significant EU-level intervention in European higher education systems. Since 1987 over one million European students have received financial assistance from the European Commission to spend part of their courses studying in a European country other than the educational institution in their home country. In most cases, this means that students who would normally study in their home countries receive funding to go abroad.

Erasmus has become one of the most visible programs of the EU and has become iconic for "Euroenthusiasts", the use of which comes from the term "Erasmus generation" to describe young Europeans (Figel, 2007, p. 6; Kuneva, 2007, p. 3) and calls for a hope, that European Youth will prove more in support of European integration, more than their parents or grandparents. It is suggested that the Erasmus Generation is composed of young people who have benefited from European integration practices, have moved around the EU countries, think of themselves as European citizens and are therefore a base of support for further European integration. Mainly among them is the alumni, the program that gives the generation its name, former students of Erasmus. It seems to be true that young citizens of European member states, and students in particular, are more likely to think of themselves as Europeans (Eurobarometer, 2008, p. 34; Hix, 1999, p. 147). Students who have participated in Erasmus tend to be particularly pro-European (ESN, 2007).

However, Erasmus is not found to be the main one. If Erasmus leads to pro-European views, one would expect only Erasmus alumni to be more pro-European than their non-Erasmus peers. There would be a first change in their attitudes while they were away. The alternative possibility is that Erasmus students are more pro-European simply because more pro-European students choose to participate. If Erasmus affects the attitudes of Erasmus students themselves, this influence may also spread through their social networks, spreading its influence beyond the students directly involved. However, it is difficult to imagine that the program could have such secondary effects without first being affected by Erasmus students (Arts, W. & Halman, L., 2005/6). However the impact would certainly be more intense for iconic individuals who actually decide to immerse themselves in another European culture through Commission-sponsored study abroad.

Erasmus has been maintained as a tool for building support for the EU among the citizens of the Member States. If the program is visibly building support for the EU among current students, some of whom will go on to become future European elites, it is important information for policy makers. Like any other government program, Erasmus has opportunity costs both in money and in the talent and attention of its administrators, who could be employed elsewhere (Murphy-Lejeune, E., 2002).

Erasmus can build support for the EU and this strengthens the case for being partially educated in a foreign country and can create support for positive international relations (Carlson, J. & Widaman, K., 1988). Promoting the student movement in general can be a means to build international solidarity. European integration is an example, although a particularly advanced more intimate international relationship which is assumed to become more common as a result of globalization (Adia, E., 1998).

These often have significant consequences for citizens in particular and public opinion in the countries involved. It can also have a significant impact on how far international integration can progress. If it is possible to spread support for international relations through schemes like Erasmus, this can facilitate the process of globalization (Adia, E., 1998).

Therefore, it can be said that it is surprising that very few studies have been conducted which can reliably assess whether participation in Erasmus causes changes in attitudes towards Europe at a political level. Previous studies either ignore the potential influence on students' political attitudes or address it in a way that does not establish causality.

V.3 Erasmus in Albania and UET

In the framework of the 30th anniversary of the Erasmus program created in 1987, later called Erasmus +, the National Council for European Integration held on December 20, 2017 a round table on the topic "European Policies for Youth". An overview of the program and the country's participation was presented by the Erasmus+ Office Albania.

The Erasmus+ National Office in Albania held on May 20, 2020, the virtual monitoring meeting, with the European University of Tirana, for International Credit Mobility (ICM), supported by the Erasmus+ program, students, academics and administrative staff, who have completed or were still in exchange movement, joined in the meeting. UET currently has 49 inter-institutional agreements with different Universities from 15 countries that are part of the program. During the last two years 2018-2020, these institutions have agreed to exchange a total of 302 students and 354 people, academic and administrative staff.

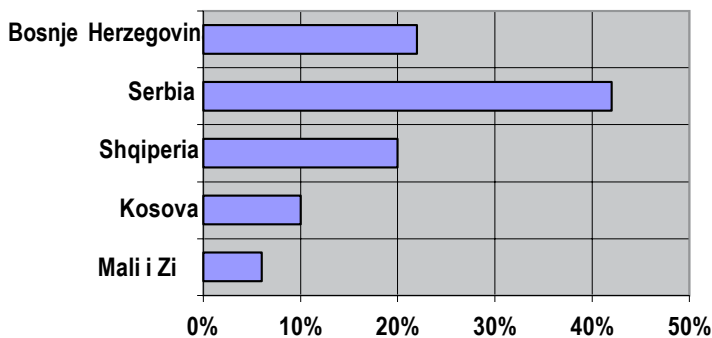


Based on data obtained from UET, in the academic year 2019-2020, 67 students benefited from the program. This number has been increased every year. If we consider the statistics of the 2015-2016 academic year, where only 17 students benefited, it is clear that the increase is considerable. This increase comes as a result of UET having developed guides in Albanian and English to help students and staff before, during and after the move. UET students can now be involved in the Erasmus Buddy/Mento programme.

For over 30 years, students and staff have moved between European universities in the Erasmus programme. Since 2015, Erasmus+ has also allowed short-term movement to Europe from other parts of the world for students, researchers and staff. This two-way movement allows students to study at a foreign university for 3-12 months and receive credits which are then recognized at the sending institution as part of their degree. Starting in 2018, trainings are also possible. Staff mobility grants of 5-60 days are available.

	TOTAL	2018	2017	2016	2015
Proposals / Albania	593	205	155	116	117
Projects / Albania	432	157	109	88	78
Students and staff going to Europe	3434	1.225	838	817	554
Students and staff coming to Albania	1952	728	509	376	339
Percentage of the regional budget (see chart)	19,8	24,71	17,58	19,7	17,21

There are distinct budgets for different regions of the world that are shared between all European countries. The institutions that are involved form bilateral partnerships with universities from Western Balkan countries and apply on behalf of their partners.



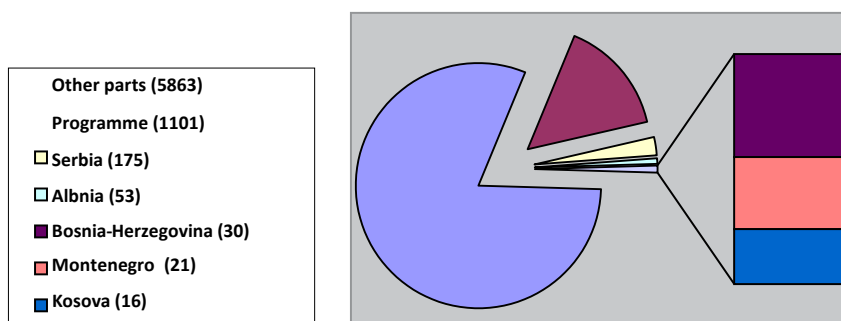
(ICM Regional Budget Western Balkans 2015-2018)

The Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Grants (EMJMD) provide EU-funded scholarships to Masters students from around the world that cover tuition, travel and a living allowance. The programs last between one and two years during which students study in at least two different European countries and receive a joint, double or multiple degree. Institutions from partner countries can also be part of the consortia offering these programs (although this is not mandatory) as full partners, which means that they officially award degrees, as Associate Partners, where they participate in the program in a type of field of study and currently offer joint degrees.

Albania in EMJMD projects	TOTAL	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
Total selected EMJMD projects	153	44	39	27	32	11
Total proposals	506	112	122	92	119	61
Total proposals covering Albania	0	0	0	0	0	0
EMJMD projects covering Albania	0	0	0	0	0	0
Full partners from Albania in EMJMD projects	0	0	0	0	0	0
Collaborators from Albania in EMJMD projects	0	0	0	0	0	0

Each EMJMD receives EU funding to award a certain number of scholarships to students around the world. Additional scholarships are also available for students from regions that make up developing or developed economies. Students apply directly to the program coordinator and can find programs in the EMJMD catalog.

	TOTAL	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
Scholarships from Albania	53	8	10	15	4	16
From the global budget	41	8	10	15	4	4
From the additional regional budget	12	0	0	0	0	12
Scholarships all over the world	7259	1669	1556	1347	1308	1379
EM programs offering scholarships	86	100	87	120	149	



(Erasmus Mundus Master Degree scholarships 2014-2018)

Erasmus+ action projects Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE), which lasts from two to three years, aim to modernize and reform higher education institutions, develop new programs, improve governance and build relations between higher education institutions and enterprises. They can also address policy themes and issues, preparing the ground for higher education reform, in collaboration with national authorities. About 11% of the global annual budget for CBHE projects is allocated to the countries of the Western Balkans.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

VI.1. Conclusions

The survey results prove that Erasmus leads to changes in social and cultural perceptions independently of being a tool of EU soft power. For Erasmus to be also an instrument of soft power as well as an instrument of PD in enhancing the image of the EU, it should:

- Avoid brain drain and promote brain circulation. The EU should encourage people who go to Europe, thanks to Erasmus, to return to their countries and help development there. Otherwise, Erasmus personal experience cannot have an impact on their hometown or region.
- A high level of mobility happens in both directions (to the EU and from the EU). In fact, EU citizens going to other countries meet and socialize with people who are not likely to participate in mobility exchanges due to age, social or economic barriers. However, there are very few EU citizens who come to Albania.
- In conclusion, we have the answer to the research question: Erasmus, as an instrument of public diplomacy, serves to increase the image of the EU, since Erasmus is a tool of soft power of the EU. The EU institutions believe that it is a tool to calculate the European choice of countries that aspire to integrate into the EU.

VI.2. Recommendations

- It is recommended that in the next program proposal, the European Commission defines the nature of the external dimension of Erasmus. Many have pointed out that the social goals in the Erasmus program have not been clearly operationalized and the EU institutions are emphasizing too much the employment benefit of the program and not enough the social and

cultural benefits. For this reason, it is recommended to give explanations on how to achieve more essential intercultural understanding for the benefit of strengthened interregional cooperation, especially between Europe and other parts of the world.

- Another recommendation would be to respect and implement the principle of co-ownership of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). This means that European Neighborhood Policy countries should be programming countries and not partner countries. In this way, they would share the same rights and duties provided by the Erasmus regulation for program countries. This would also encourage EU stakeholders (i.e. universities) to increase the number of exchanges with these countries, as they will have the same responsibilities.

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Security Challenges in Albania After the 1990s

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Abstract

In recent decades, security has become a concept that relates to every aspect of our lives due to its expansion and deepening and its relation to many areas of society. Security challenges faced by societies today are of different natures and forms, including weak governance structures, organized crime, corruption, and non-implementation of strategies. Albania, in particular, has faced many challenges and a negative international image due to these problems. This paper aims to provide an overview of the security challenges that Albania has encountered since the 1990s, by analyzing them separately and explaining the strategies, tools, and methods Albania uses to respond to these challenges. Additionally, the paper identifies the bilateral and multilateral agreements that Albania has signed with some Balkan countries and relevant allies in the international arena concerning common security. Through an analysis of strategies, legal frameworks, and measures taken to meet and overcome security challenges, this study attempts to answer the questions posed. The analysis is based on literature research, relevant publications in the security field of study, and laws and strategies on the evolution of security challenges in Albania.

Keywords: *security, challenges, strategy, threat, Albania.*

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I. Introduction: albania's context and national security after the '90s.

Security field in Albania has followed the same path with other countries, especially small ones. Until the fall of the communist regime, the notion of security was associated with the concept of defence or territorial integrity of the country. Thus, during this period, we cannot talk about a broad concept of security or a document that treated security as such. Like other small countries, Albania achieved and maintained its status as a sovereign state with the help and protection of great powers and international treaties. Nowadays, the security environment is different from what it was in the nineteenth century or during the 30s of the twentieth century, periods when the world's largest conflicts took place. Given that the environment of conflicts is a permanent topic in the studies of international relations, in this article I will also take into analysis the understanding of the new security environment and the challenges it faces. The new security challenges in Albania after the '90s cannot be solved only through classical or traditional methods because new challenges require non-traditional solutions.

The changes in the world order and the creation of a new international system coincided with the political regime change in Albania in 1990. After almost half a century of rule by the Communist Party, pluralism was introduced in Albania, and the first multiparty elections were held. During the transition period, the state was weak, and the problems displayed themselves mainly in the domestic domain, rather than in relation to other states. The security of the country was put to test with the break-up of Yugoslavia during the 1990s.

“Although Albania was not involved in armed conflicts or redefinition of its borders, which happened to the countries of former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, it still suffered from the backwardness caused by the policy of isolation that was pursued during the Cold War. This period is mostly characterized by the implementation of the first generation reforms: the creation of new institutions and structures as well as new lines of responsibility for the security sector. However, the first generation reform process was not completed as a result of the 1997 crisis which led to the fall of the government” (IDM: 2011:5).

The period after 1997 is more like a post-conflict period. It is the Kosovo crisis, which followed the war in Kosovo in the period 1998-1999. This period coincides with reforms focusing on strengthening security structures and democratic governance. Since the 2000s, the security sector has been consolidating, which can be seen in the strengthening and consolidation of security institutions.

Given that during the communist regime, the security sector was highly politicized and served as the main instrument for maintaining power, a deep political and institutional reform was necessary. This reform was seen as a challenge in the face of other challenges, but necessary to get undertaken, because when an efficient legal system is in place and security institutions are regulated, then there is economic growth and increase in investments. Indeed “Security from disorder, crime and violence is fundamental for reducing poverty (...) - and, more broadly, for sustainable economic, social and political development” (OECD, 2007: Section 1: Principles of Security System Reform, p.1). In order to escape from insecurity, crime and underdevelopment, states should address simultaneously the socioeconomic dimension, the justice and security dimension. The security system reform is first and foremost a political process (OECD, 2007: 28), and as such it is conditioned by the will of political parties and government to carry out the reforms (Born, 2002). Albania held its first democratic elections in March 1991, which resulted in the first pluralist parliament. This which paved the way for the depoliticization of the security sector. During the period 1997-2000, took place several important events and developments which influenced the security reform in country:

- An attempt to take over institutions by force (after the collapse of the Ponzi schemes)
- Adoption of Constitution in 1998
- The crisis of Kosovo and the refugees who fled to Albania in 1998
- In 1999, Albania received the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) at the Washington Summit.
- Formalization of relations with the European Union (EU) through the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) – launched in June 1999, which was the European Union’s policy towards the Western Balkans, established with the aim of eventual EU membership.

Restoring rule of law and recovering and strengthening the institutions after the crisis of 1997 became fundamental and thus made it an imperative the country’s orientation towards NATO and EU integration. The National Security Strategy (NSS) and the Military Strategy (MS) indicated that the main risks to achieve security in country, stemmed from the lack of political stability, weak economic development, and the prolongation of the transition process (Islami, 2007).

1.1 The Changing of the World Order and Albania

After the Cold War, there was a change in the world order from bipolar to unipolar, where the USA was the hegemon. Albania, which had been a part of the eastern



bloc, began to orient itself towards the West and designed and followed pro-Western policies. These policies aimed to align the country with the foreign policy of USA and its allies, which emerged victorious with the end of the Cold War. Albania was among the first countries that applied to become part of the Euro-Atlantic structures. The reasons Albania followed this path are many, but the main one was the protection and development of the country under the control of the USA. Albania had weak national power, and lacked the capacity to control its own territory, and consequently it was not successful in its foreign policy to influence the other countries in the region.

The concept of power is central to all theories of international relations, although different theories may have varying interpretations of power in specific conditions and circumstances. While power cannot fully capture the complexities of international relations, no contemporary theory of the international system can overlook the importance of state power. States frequently exercise their power and pursue their policies with the goal of enhancing state power, and even if power is not explicitly wielded, it is still a fundamental factor in international relations that cannot be disregarded. Power can take various forms and have diverse origins, including military or diplomatic might, as well as natural sources such as geography and demography, or the product of social, cultural, and economic forces. Defining the concept of power is not a straightforward task.

Assessing a nation's consolidated national power capabilities involves evaluating its rich natural resources, developed economy and industrial production, strong defense capabilities, effective governance, and diplomacy. By analyzing a nation's space and resource capacities, one can gauge the extent of its power, influence, and international relations. Security and political researchers use three factors to conceptualize the dimensions of national power: national power potentials, scope, and limits. Nevertheless, accurately assessing power is challenging, as it requires measuring and analyzing a broad range of tangible and intangible elements of national power. The changing global order has also led to changes in the actors involved, with some emerging as young actors who have rapidly ascended to the stage of regional power. In Europe and the Balkans, international factors are more prominent, given the fragility and internal problems of the Balkan countries that have been resolved over time with the assistance of various international organizations.

During periods of conflict and crisis, the UN and NATO, with the strong backing of the USA, were the primary international actors in the region. However, after a decade of conflicts, the EU emerged as the most significant international actor in the region. The EU's involvement in the region can be conceptualized as two cycles of transformation. The first cycle began after the war in Bosnia, with the creation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Stability Pact, which

took a regional approach to fundamental issues such as defining status and borders, transitioning to democracy and the market economy, state-building, and developing state administrative capabilities. The second cycle focuses on a more individual state approach to stabilization association, concentrating on each country's reforms in its relationship with the EU. The shift towards an individual approach, the principle of conditionality, and clear definitions of internal reforms that must be undertaken to meet EU membership criteria shaped the approach according to each country's needs and situation in the region, making the enlargement policy crucial for resolving security issues in the region (Zela, 2013: 81).

II. Methodology of the Study

This paper will focus on understanding the security challenges faced by Albania's National Security after the 1990s. It will analyze the country's capacity to address economic, political, and military security challenges and explore the strategies, tools, and methods that Albania has employed to respond to these security threats. The study will also identify and interpret bilateral and multilateral agreements that Albania has made with neighboring countries and key international allies/actors in the context of common security. The study hypothesis is that *the main security challenges faced by the National Security of Albania after the 90s are political and economic ones.*

The method used is documents analysis, which is a research method that involves examining and interpreting documents as primary sources of data to understand a particular phenomenon or topic. The research model is that of the case study - focused on Albania. The characteristics of a case study carries are:

1. Includes a single case or a small number of cases, but each of them is explored in depth.
2. Different types of data can be stored in them, and long-term data can also be included.
3. The case study has boundaries. It makes clear what is studied and what is not (Matthews & Ross, 2010: 128).

As can be seen from the above characteristics, the case study model is suitable for this study because:

- It includes a single case, which is Albania, which is studied in depth;
- Data that can be collected to study security challenges are diverse and can include primary and secondary data (including the analysis of various documents).



Thus, in this paper we will be based on primary and secondary data, which consists on the following materials.

- Primary materials such as strategic documents, which include National Security Strategy, Military Strategy, Social Protection Strategy, Environmental Strategy, etc. Official reports drafted by institutions dealing with security issues and bilateral and multilateral agreements focusing on security. The statements of various actors regarding the security challenges faced by Albania.
- Secondary materials include various books published on security issues and authors such as Collins, Buzan, Law, etc. Also, the study of media articles related to national security will be a basis for examining the security challenges that Albania has faced over the years. Military magazines are one of my research instruments regarding military security and the evolution of studies within this field. The various economic reports will be another literature source where I will be based. Through them, it will be documented the development that Albania has made over the years and the economic security challenges it has faced.

III. Albania in front of Security Challenges after the 1990's

The analysis of the security environment considers all elements of national security as a process that examines the advantages, weaknesses and opportunities the strategic environment offers and the risks that the country faces. Current security threats are more complex than in the past. "The geographical position places Albania on the map of the transit of narcotics, originating in Asia, and close to the dangers arising from instability in the Middle East and North Africa. The transfer of political conflicts, especially those based on religion, various traffics and illegal immigration remain a major challenge for the security of the country" (Military Strategy: 2015: 11). The expansion and deepening of the concept of security reflected the multi-sectoral approach to security. Today, threats are not traditional or of a military nature where the reference object is the state. Today we have threats to economic security, where the reference object is the national economy; social security, where the reference object is the individual or collective identity; political security, where the reference object is national sovereignty; and environmental security, where the reference object is the ecosystem.

III.1. Military Security Challenges

Military security is the most conventional aspect of security. Albania is a member of the Euro-Atlantic Alliance and a candidate country for integration into the EU. Both of these geopolitical actors are interested to have stability in the Balkan region, which is currently considered one of the most fragile. The risks of instability are rather the “merits” of internal developments, which are being exploited quite a bit by other geopolitical actors. The EU and NATO have repeatedly stated the need for stability to avoid crises. Regardless of the amplitude of the oscillations that the crises can cause in the region’s countries, for these two actors, in terms of security, they (the crises) shake the trust in the alliances for the country’s behaviour to solve its own issues. Both actors (EU & NATO) have been maximally engaged in solving the crisis. However, their action has been accompanied by a minimal impact on the internal actors. So, the crisis has a completely negative impact on the country’s image in reference to the major security actors and the security process itself. Albania is a ‘small’ country, which fails to rise to the level of a ‘small power’. Without real power capacities, it will continuously face security risks beyond its management capabilities and will be in constant search for the role of great powers and allies. The more delicate the Balkan region becomes, and the more limited the power capacities of Albania, the more the crisis directly affects the security dilemma.

Regrettably, the political situation in Albania has extended beyond electoral and institutional impact to include national interests at the strategic level. This has caused significant risks not only to the formation of political elites but also to the nation as a whole. During the pre-globalization era, national security was a closed and unified concept and system, created when external influences were not essential. However, in the current era, when countries are part of the competitive system of the global market or open information network, national security is a multi-level and comprehensive issue that cannot be limited to internal security alone. Additionally, “security” cannot be a narrow concept limited to Westphalian sovereignty, but instead, it must be a broad and dynamic concept. Any crisis that affects even one element of conventional security has the potential to impact the entire national security level.

As a potential challenge to Albania’s military security, conventional risk or any terrorist attack can be considered a result of NATO membership and the contribution made to global peace and security. Also, “due to the obligations stemming from Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, the Republic of Albania may be involved in a conventional conflict in cases where the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of any of its allies are threatened. Developments on the

borders of the Alliance, the misuse of national minorities for political purposes and the change of borders, contrary to international law, testify to the existence of this danger” (Military Strategy, 2015: 12). A not less important challenge is the modernization of the Armed Forces (AF) in order to be on equal terms with the member countries of the Alliance as well as to be in accordance with the new strategic concept of NATO.

III.2. Challenges to Economic Security

Economic security is a crucial aspect of overall security, especially in today’s era of economic globalization and integration. It encompasses the ability to manage various risks, crises, and challenges, and effectively leverage different economic networks such as currencies, finance, trade, investments, and resource development to succeed in market competition. The concept of economic security has evolved as a result of the changing global landscape after the Cold War and extends beyond the traditional notion of security, although it is still interconnected to it since economic issues can lead to conflicts. There are different approaches to economic security, but the most common ones are micro-level and macro-level economic security.

“Micro-level economic security focuses on “localized” actors, such as individuals, family households, and local communities that are primarily interested in ensuring the security of their livelihoods. On the other hand, macro-level economic security is generally concerned with foreign economic policy and the engagement of nation-states in the international economic system.” (Collins, 2016: 263). Thus it is necessary to combine the micro-level economic security with the macro-level in order to have a more in depth analysis for the Albanian case, considering that the micro level is used for internal economic security and the macro for external economic security or in relation to regional actors.

Based on various factors, including data on imports and exports, concessions based on clientelistic relationships, bad governance, inefficient fiscal policies, and corruption at high levels, it can be argued that Albania does not currently have economic security. This conclusion is supported by the country’s experiences since the end of the Cold War and the political and economic changes that followed. Albania is presently facing an economic crisis that many perceive as a political crisis, with the two interconnected and mutually reinforcing each other. Economic instability can lead to political instability, and vice versa. Domestic and international actors alike find it challenging to operate in an environment characterized by widespread disobedience, tax evasion, and disrespect for the state. The only way to address these challenges and restore economic security is to find a solution to the crisis that is fundamentally

different from the current situation. Economic security is a critical aspect of national security, and the two are closely interlinked.

III.3. Challenges to Political Security

Political security is a concept that involves maintaining political stability and harmony within a state, with the goal of gaining support from political elites, the state administration, including the armed forces and law enforcement structures, and the general public. To achieve political security, it is necessary to have an efficient and honest political system that operates under the rule of law. Political crises, which are often rooted in leadership crises, can have a significant impact on the state and society as a whole. To promote political security, it is necessary to create solidarity among the political leadership, propose a national agenda, and set strategic goals that resonate with society. This involves implementing continuous reforms in systems and regulations, avoiding attempts to accumulate power, and dealing systematically with different types of social conflicts to prevent the possibility of political and social disturbances.

According to Buzan (1983) he emphasizes the importance of building a stable and legitimate political order as a means of achieving political security. Keohane (2002) argues that political security is not only about the protection of state sovereignty but also about the stability and predictability of the international system as a whole. He suggests that political security can be achieved through institutions that provide for collective security, such as the United Nations, and through cooperative efforts among states to resolve conflicts peacefully. For Robert J. Art (1990) political security is one of the components of the “comprehensive security”. According to him, political security involves the ability of a state to maintain political stability and control over its territory, as well as to manage political challenges and dissent within its borders. Ole Wæver (1996), one of the representatives of the Copenhagen School of security studies, has written about the role of political institutions and processes in shaping political security, and he argues that democratic institutions and practices can contribute to greater political stability and security. Thus we may safely say that without political security it is not possible to achieve security at all.

“The democratic transition and the Euro-Atlantic integration, the free movement in Schengen Area, the material goods, services, money, and information have introduced Albania into a new process, which is not just a phenomenon or a transitory trend. This international system replaced the Cold War system, of which we were also a part. The main threats Albania faces today at the internal level are



organized crime, corruption, terrorism, natural disasters, etc. On the external level, there is organized crime, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, regional conflicts, etc” (Demi, 2006: 24).

Based on the objectives of the Albanian state and the need to successfully overcome these threats, which also threaten political security, we see Albania’s security and progress related to the Euro-Atlantic institutions. Albania was among the first Eastern European countries to seek membership in NATO and the EU, trying to make parallel progress in the political, economic, military, legislative and information security fields. In order to have political security and development, Albania must have good governance and strengthening of institutions, ability and stability to run the country democratically, the rule of law, economic development, fight against organized crime, trafficking, corruption, money laundering, terrorism, and fundamental human rights and freedoms must be respected. Currently, Albania is working on strengthening the rule of law and institutions in the framework of Justice Reform, which will clean the judicial system of corruption and lack of professionalism, lighting the lights of hope for many Albanians who have been missing them. Justice. Likewise, the institutions are getting stronger every day through various reforms and the employment of young people who are excellent at completing their studies and support with modern logistical tools. Today, Albania contributes to increase security in the world and also in the region through various missions undertaken within NATO. Albania is following policies based on regional development and political and economic cooperation, intending to fulfil the conditions to become a member of the European Union as soon as possible.

III.4. Environmental Security Challenges

The concept of security can be applied to many different aspects and address various threats. Given this context, it is not surprising that the environment has also been seen as a security reference object and that environmental changes have been considered security threats. Environmental Security is an issue that does not belong to traditional security. It is one of the issues the well-known author Barry Buzan (1983) used to deepen and expand the security concept. In many developed and developing countries, natural resources and environmental services are essential for the economy and employment. Income from key sectors such as agriculture, tourism, mining, and fishing that depend on the environment can affect a country’s economy if there is environmental change. Therefore, there is a connection between environmental security and social or human security. Starting from this fact, we must also divide some

environmental security problems by doing a cross-sectoral analysis since some problems are global. Among the problems that threaten Albania are air pollution, climate change, chemical and waste management, industrial pollution, damages of the natural environment and protected areas, forests, pastures, and water resources.

The air is more polluted in urban areas and comes from “the transport sector, which is related to the large number of vehicles that do not meet the air emission standards, the quality of the fuels they use, the year of their production, as well as the use of motor vehicles without a catalytic converter favors the growth of dust and the discharge of combustion gases” (Intersectoral Environmental Strategy 2015-2020). Although legal initiatives have been taken by various governments in terms of improving air quality, referring mainly to the transport sector, there is still work to be done in this direction. In addition to the transport sector, the reduction of air quality is also significantly affected by the industrial areas, where we can mention the metallurgical plant of Elbasan and the various cement and limestone factories in the areas of Kruja. Quarries have also been another problem that the government is securing in power.

Another issue related to environmental security and seen as a security challenge is the reduction of green areas and deforestation. Despite the moratorium that the government has put on banning hunting and deforestation, this threat is still present, becoming to some extent even ridiculous since instead of trees, palaces are being “planted.” Deforestation is a problem that is linked also to other environmental problems, such as floods and landslides. It also affects oxygen level reduction and gives a negative image of mountain tourism. “The impacts of climate change present important challenges for Albania, in particular to face the impacts on energy, agriculture, health, tourism, biodiversity and the well-being of the community” (Cross-Sectoral Environmental Strategy 2014-2020). In Albania, agriculture is the most affected by climate change, followed by the tourism sector. Referring to the Intersectoral Environmental Strategy for 2014-2020, it is noticed that waste management in the country still needs to improve. A significant amount of waste circulates in the water network affecting the degradation of protected areas and reducing their regenerative abilities. Despite implementing some projects to differentiate waste in Albania, the situation remains the same. Also, waste recycling or their annihilation in landfills has yet to be adopted as a culture.

IV. Strategies, Security Agreements, and Common Security

IV.1 Strategies Employed to Respond to Security Challenges

Strategy generally involves defining goals, determining actions to achieve goals, and mobilizing resources to execute actions (Freedman: 2015). Like every country, Albania also designs strategies through which it aims to respond to various challenges. The primary strategy of Albania is the National Security Strategy, then other strategies follow. “At the foundation of the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Albania is the aspiration of the Albanian people and the political will to realize the common vision for a homeland that guarantees security, justice, equality, and well-being for today and future generations, a free, democratic and developed country, dedicated member of NATO and integrated in the European Union” (National Security Strategy of Republic of Albania, 2014: 3).

The following sections will present the measures taken to respond to the security challenges that Albania has encountered in the military, economic, and environmental sectors. It will also reflect the objectives the Albanian state has set for itself to respond efficiently to these challenges.

IV.2. Military Security challenges – A Strategic Response

The current defense situation in Albania has made considerable progress since it joined NATO because certain conditions must be fulfilled in advance to become part of this organization. Albania’s membership in NATO on April 1, 2009, marked a significant achievement, as it was one of the main aspirations of the National Development and Integration Strategy of 2007-2013. After the accession, the Albanian Parliament approved the National Security Strategy, from which the primary constitutional obligations derive: 1) guaranteeing the security of the country; 2) strengthening fundamental freedoms, human rights, and the rule of law; 3) protection and promotion of the interests of Albanian citizens; 4) preservation of national identity (Council of Ministers of Albania, 2014). Basically, this strategy is the aspiration of the Albanian people and the political will to realize a shared vision that guarantees: safety, security, justice, equality, and prosperity for present and future generations.

The progress mentioned above consists of creating a Professional Force, complementing the hierarchy of strategic documents in the defense field, determining a quota of 2% to the PPB of the defense budget, and as an obligation to NATO. Destruction of 180 tons of chemicals was part of Albania’s progress,

having from active participation in the operations led by NATO, the EU, and the UN and the completion of the legal framework with the most important legal acts and bylaws in the fields of defense.

IV.3. The Response To Economic Security Challenges

The financial markets have had a significant development from the point of view of the growth of financial participants in the market and the increase in the variety of products. It is noted that in recent years Albania has had an increase in the number of non-banking financial intermediaries whose primary focus of their activity is channeling savings towards investments in securities, thus increasing the level of competition in the market and making the latter even more competitive. The improvements in the primary market have resulted from the improvement and increase of opportunities for investments in different conditions, which translates into an increase in the number of higher investors, more transparent investment strategies, and opportunities for the functioning of the fair market.

The main challenges of financial policies in Albania lie in several key areas. The first and most important step is to ensure a medium-term and sustainable increase in employment and the standard of living of Albanians. This can be achieved by increasing macroeconomic stability, especially in terms of reducing public debt, putting finances on a stable basis, and removing obstacles to medium-term growth. The deficit and public debt issue is another key element that increases the need to orient the policies toward medium-term fiscal consolidation.

These reforms will have to be accompanied by: (1) *further easing of monetary policy, assuming that inflation and exchange market pressures will remain low*; (2) *appropriate monetary policies, which will ensure price stability and facilitate full employment in the economy*; (3) *full payment of outstanding government bills prior to 2013*; (4) *reducing the rate of bad loans (NPL), aiming to restore confidence in banks and revive lending to the economy*; (5) *the continuation of reforms directly related to progress towards EU accession, as a key part of the structural reforms program*; (6) *the need to address low inflationary pressures*; (7) *the need to ensure stable and healthy lending returns*; (8) *the protection of financial stability, especially in relation to the management of credit risk and the improvement of indicators of the quality of banks' assets, within the framework of taking measures to clean up the financial statements of banks and solving the problem of bad loans*; and (9) *mitigating the effects deriving from problematic developments in the Eurozone (with a direct focus on Greece and the structural adjustments imposed by banking groups, based in Europe, in the context of reducing their exposure to controlled subsidiaries outside the EU and international financial markets)* (Ministry of Finance of Republic of Albania, 2014)



IV.4. Challenges of Environmental Security - A Strategic Response

Environmental protection includes within it a number of issues that make up the central issue of environmental protection. They include issues as diverse as air quality, climate change, chemical and waste management, industrial pollution, the natural environment and protected areas, forests, grasslands, and water resources. Each sector requires a separate analysis and is separate from the others. However, in this part, we analyze an overview focusing on the main issues that each sector requires. However, the population's exposure to air pollution, measured as an increase in the annual percentage of days with pollution, remains problematic. According to the same report, "the percentage of the area of protected areas in Albania has gradually increased to 16.6% of the country's territory by 2015, of which 16.1% for land and coastal areas and 0.5% for the marine area. The percentage of these protected areas has increased over the past 14 years and exceeded the MDG target of 14%." (National Environment Agency, 2017).

V. The Capacities of the Albanian State to Face Security Challenges

An issue of fundamental importance for Albania is also the issue of the capacities it possesses. The world has evolved into a more or less uniform system of Westphalian-type states that differ among themselves mainly by the degree of power they possess, geographic location, and cultural heritage. Identifying possible risks and threats to the country's security is one of the prerequisites for their prediction and for determining the requirements and needs for the preparation of capacities to cope with them. Based on the capacities that Albania possesses, geographical, political, economic, and military factors, Albania cannot play a leading role in the region or in influencing regional policies.

The new security environment in the Balkan region is increasingly characterized by overcoming the old mindsets of confrontation between states and by the spirit of cooperation, and integration into collective security structures, as a reduction of traditional threats. Nowadays, Albania faces new challenges, threats, and dangers that we see in non-traditional forms and content. Threats today are asymmetric on terrorist, ethnic or religious grounds. Ethnic problems characterize the Balkan region. In Albania, there has been a revival of this phenomenon several times, which is more likely an artificial incentive to cause insecurity.

Some primary challenges for Albania's security system are non-military, where organized crime, terrorism, immigration, and environmental destruction prevail. All these threats have minor consequences if their source, composition, and degree

of risk are known. To face the threats today, it is required to restructure the systems of decision-making and reorganization of Albania's national security measures to collect and analyze information. With its military and economic capacities, Albania cannot face the challenges that threaten it. In the military aspect, Albania is based on guaranteeing security based on NATO and its article 5. However, we should bear in mind that by the time this article is activated, the possible aggressor has carried out his plan. In order to face the threats of an economic nature, Albania must have a productive and competitive economy, which is the opposite of what we currently have. With a public debt increasing daily, with empty state coffers, the country cannot recognize development and progress and, therefore, cannot be alert to the dangers that threaten it. In order to successfully face the dangers and threats, Albania should make considerable progress in building the rule of law, which must be separated from organized crime, corruption, and illegal actions that harm the country's development and its integration into the EU.

VI. Security Agreements with other Countries in the Region

Agreements on security indicate that the concept of security and cooperation has evolved. Albania has signed several agreements on security with the region's countries and beyond. The signing of these agreements comes as a result of the interdependence of security, taking into account regional and global security. Likewise, through these agreements, Albania aims to develop all components of national security.

Some of the agreements and initiatives in which Albania is a part are:

- The process of engagement of Southeast Europe countries in cooperation in the field of regional security and defense (SEDM) at the Ministerial level;
- The Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSCE) consists of twelve member states with full rights and thirteen other states with observer status. The organization has an economic profile;
- The Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII) consists of eight member countries which are Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Italy, Greece, Montenegro and Serbia. The aim of this initiative is to encourage and deepen regional cooperation, seeing this as a contribution to the European integration of member countries;
- The Adriatic Charter (A3), which has become the initiative (A5) after the inclusion on it also of Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina;
- The Stabilization Association Process (SAP), a specific EU process for the countries of the Western Balkans, to enable the countries to join the

European family as quickly as possible. Each country must individually sign the Stabilization Association Agreement (SAA) as a final preparatory stage for negotiating candidacy for EU integration. (Official Journal of the Republic of Albania, July 14, 2014);

- The Stability Pact for Southeast Europe, initiated in 1999 by Germany, is considered the most important initiative for the long-term regulation of relations between states in this region. The Stability Pact for Southeast Europe, after 2008, was transformed into the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). Its activity focuses on five main directions: economic and social development, infrastructure and energy, justice and internal affairs, the field of security, parliamentary cooperation, and human capital;
- Southeast European countries cooperation initiative (SECI), suggested by the USA in 1996, with the aim of cross-border regional cooperation, cooperation in the justice sector, in the fight against phenomena such as terrorism, organized crime, human trafficking illegal drugs and weapons;
- The Central European Initiative (CEI), within the EU integration process. The purpose of this initiative consists in the cooperation of the countries of the region in the political and economic fields as well as in good neighborly relations;
- The process of cooperation between the countries of Southeast Europe (SEECF) in terms of peace, strengthening of security, stability of good neighborly relations, economic-political-social development, justice, the fight against organized crime, drugs, and illegal traffic of weapons and terrorism (Fita, 2011: 36);
- The Multinational Peacekeeping Force of Southeast Europe (SEEPRIG) consists of seven member countries: Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Romania, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Turkey. Also, five countries have an observer role in this initiative: the USA, Ukraine, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia, and Croatia. The purpose of this initiative is to contribute to regional security and stability, mutual trust, strengthening of good neighborly relations between the countries of Southeast Europe in the context of the SEDM process, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), and the spirit of the Partnership for Peace (PfP);
- Center for Security Cooperation (RACVIAC);
- The Regional Initiative for Migration, Asylum, and Refugees (MARRI), aims to contribute to the free and regular movement of people in the interest of security and prosperity related to migration, asylum, integrated border management, visa policies, and consular cooperation, return of refugees, etc. Six member states participating in this initiative: Albania, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Montenegro;

- The International Balkan Fund (WBF) was created by the Foreign Ministers of the Balkan countries. The WBF consists of these members Albania, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Montenegro and aims to promote cooperation between members, strengthen regional relations and cohesion, as well as to encourage and promote integration in the Union European (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania).

VII. Conclusions / Recommendations

Current security threats are more complex than in the past. The expansion and deepening of the security concept reflected the multi-sectoral approach to security. Nowadays, the threats are not traditional or of a military nature where the reference object is the state, but there are different dimensions of threats. Albania is a 'small' country, which does not rise to the level of a 'small power'; in the absence of real power capacities, it will continuously face security risks beyond its management capabilities and in search of the role of the great powers and allies. Like every country, Albania also designs strategies through which it aims to respond to various challenges. Albania's primary strategy is the National Security Strategy, which other strategies follow. Corruption, low management efficiency, inefficient bureaucratic models, etc., influence the birth and evolution of social crises and are seen as potential social security challenges.

It is the direct responsibility of the elites to evaluate the social risks and build programs that find compliance with the elites and the public. The elites are responsible for the political crises, which, more than any other source, is rooted in the leadership crisis. Political security is related to and includes elements of political harmony, with the aim that the current policies of the state and the general strategy (grand strategy) should gain the support of all political elites and state administration, including the armed forces and law enforcement bodies. The prerequisite for an efficient and honest political system is that it operates under the rule of law.

Based on the objectives of the Albanian state and the need to successfully overcome political security threats, we see Albania's security and progress as linked to the Euro-Atlantic institutions. Albania must follow policies based on regional development and political and economic cooperation to fulfill the conditions to become a member of the European Union. As far as economic security is concerned, the only way to avoid risks to economic security is to find a solution to the crisis, which is all else different from the current situation. The development of a stable and prosperous economy, the attraction of foreign direct investments, the



promotion of internal investments, and the promotion of strategic projects should be at the center of attention of the government elite for Albania's economic security to be strong, in the face of the challenges presented to him.

In order to successfully face the security challenges, the role of the implementing actors of the National Security Strategy must be reviewed once again, as this role is essential to turn it and other strategies into an action tool and not just a document that remains on paper. However, a better adaptation of the central role of each institution should be made for the realization of specific aspects of the strategies depending on the threats, risks, or chances and opportunities that can be created based on these strategies. Priority should be given to the development and strengthening of the power capacities of the Albanian state, which is achieved through the common will and the passing of the personal interests of the leading political elites. Albania must work hard to build a legal state, which must be separated from organized crime, corruption, and illegal actions that harm the country's development and its integration into the EU. Based on threats such as organized crime, and corruption, it is recommended to conduct a vetting process for every employee of the public administration, employment based on meritocracy, and continuous training for them in order to have an administration public clean, professional, and at the same level as the developed countries. So, Albania should be insured against these threats. Membership in various security alliances should be seen and used in the context of internal benefit, not just external. Also, this cooperation is necessary to increase security and prevent illegal activities in Albania and the region. It is necessary to design and implement efficient policies to improve the economic situation, strengthen state institutions, and inform the public to increase the trustworthiness of society in the state.

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The Importance of EU Integration for Albania

MSc. Erjona REÇI

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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