

# *Albanian Contribution to International Peacekeeping: Identity, Interests and Peacekeeping* \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Abstract**

*This article examines Albanian contribution to international peacekeeping and explores the politics behind peacekeeping engagements. The article argues that the overarching rationale for Albanian contribution to peacekeeping derives from the desire to advance its national interest of Euro-Atlantic integration and regional security, and reconstruct state identity from a post-communist weak state to an exporter of security, vibrant democracy, and responsible state. In this realm of self-centred motivations, the discourse on international responsibility, solidarity, global peace, and security is rather more rhetorical than primary intentions of Albania for contributing to peacekeeping. Through this analysis, the article contributes to understanding ‘unintended peacekeepers’ as well as the politics of new and emerging troop-contributing countries and their practice of self-interested solidarity in international affairs. In disentangling the mixed motives for contributing to peacekeeping, the article hold that pluralist accounts are more reliable than individual strands of theories on peacekeeping.*

**Keywords:** Albania, security, peacekeeping, interests, NATO

The changing nature of global affairs and the emergence of new transnational security challenges has expanded the engagement of regional actors in international peacekeeping. Although the UN continues to be a preferable platform for peacekeeping, regional organisations have gradually constituted their global agency by arranging their own peace operations. Between 2000 and 2010, there have been 18 UN peacekeeping missions, whilst NATO has conducted six missions and the EU five missions (Daniel 2013: 30). As regional organisations have increasingly asserted their role in international peacekeeping, small states have found more space to become token contributors. This article seeks to examine the role of small states in the new peacekeeping dynamics to understand how they are utilising these shifting grounds to redefine their identity, national interest, and global role. In understanding the role of small states in the new complex architecture of peacekeeping, this article provides the first comprehensive account of Albanian contribution to international peacekeeping and explores the politics and rationales behind contributing to peacekeeping.

Since the fall of the communist regime in the early 1990s, Albania has gradually increased its modest contribution to international peacekeeping. From 1996 to 2013 Albania contributed with around 6,000 troops to different peacekeeping operations. Over the past decade, Albania has leaned more towards NATO-led peacekeeping military operations. The first deployment was as part of SFOR mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its largest contributions to date are as part ISAF in Afghanistan with 211 troops under Turkish and Italian command and the US-led Joint Coalition in Iraq, where Albania provided 215 troops between 2003 and 2008. Between 2008 and 2010, Albania contributed to EU's mission in Chad with 189 troops. Albania has also engaged with EU's ALTHEA operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina with 1,473 soldiers over the years. Of particular importance, Albania has provided a very symbolic number of troops to UN peacekeeping, evident with the participation in UNOMIG in Georgia, UNMISS in South Sudan, and in Chad with MINURCAT. Albania's modest, but consistent, contribution to peacekeeping both in its neighbourhood and beyond, raises a number of questions. What explain Albania's interest to contribute to peacekeeping despite its limited financial means and weak institutional structures? Why has Albania prioritised NATO- and EU-led peace operations over the UN peacekeeping? How have domestic, regional, and global developments shaped Albania's taken on peacekeeping?

In exploring these questions, it is quintessential to invoke a pluralist account to encounter for the multitudinous rationales that shape small states' contribution to peacekeeping. Dominant theoretical accounts on peacekeeping that lean more on realist, liberalist and constructivist debates cannot provide alone sufficient theoretical grounds for reality-adequate analysis of peacekeeping. Hence, pluralist turn to peacekeeping propagated by Alex J Bellamy and Paul D Williams (2013)

provides more adequate pathways for investigating the micro-politics and complex context-driven rationales for contributing to peacekeeping. Accordingly, this article argues that the overarching rationales for Albanian contribution to peacekeeping derive from its desire to advance Euro-Atlantic integration, regional security, and reconstruct state identity and image from a weak post-communist state to an exporter of security, vibrant democracy, and responsible state. In this realm of self-centred motivations, the discourse on international responsibility and solidarity as well as the desire for global peace and security is more rhetorical rather than primary intentions of Albania for contributing to peacekeeping. Specifically, peacekeeping was framed by Albania as a measure of reforming the military and achieving domestic political stability, after several waves of internal turmoil during the 1990s. By identifying Albania's rationales for participating in peacekeeping, this article contributes to understanding the emerging phenomena of 'unintended peacekeepers' as well as the politics of new and emerging troop-contributing countries and their practice of self-interested solidarity in international affairs. The case of Albania as an unintended peacekeeper signifies those countries that contribute to international peacekeeping not driven primarily by normative commitments, but rather based on strategic decisions to exploit peacekeeping as a means to fulfil more immediate and vital national interests and address foreign policy objectives.

This article proceeds by first outlining national interest of small states for contributing to peacekeeping. It then examines the contextual circumstances that ignite Albania's interest for peacekeeping. The article then explores three main rationales for contributing to peacekeeping, which include: reforming armed forces in the process of NATO membership, enhancing regional stability, and improving international prestige. The article contends that Albania is a case of unintentional peacekeeping, and considers how this shapes global politics of peacekeeping.

## **National interest of small states and international peacekeeping**

First it is crucial to contextualise Albania's case as an unintended and token peacekeeper within the realm of theoretical debates on the national interest of small states and the politics of international peacekeeping. All types of definitions can consider Albania as a small state (Ingebritsen 2006). It has a population of less than three million, with one of the poorest economies in Europe, and a small territory, alongside with small army and young political institutions (Pettifer and Vickers 2009). Albania, as most small states, has a foreign policy that leans more towards utilising multilateral capabilities, international law and institutional mechanisms to advance its interest and resolve peacefully internal and inter-state conflicts (Hey

2003: 5). In doing so, small states often associate themselves with regional and global powers and build strategic dependency to advance their security interests and strengthen their position (Cooper and Shaw 2009). In such circumstances, small states contribute to international peace by avoiding becoming a source of conflict, by creating capabilities for resolving peacefully conflict abroad, and by deploying preventative diplomacy and sanctions (Freymond 2009: 2).

Small states also provide for peacekeeping to enhance their global image, benefit economically and encourage foreign investment. Small states often put forward altruistic arguments of peacekeeping to frame positively their hidden vital interests. This is the case for example with Singapore, which considers UN peacekeeping as a significant contribution to international peace and security and is primarily motivated to maintain international rule of law. Ireland contributes to UN peacekeeping for normative commitments as well as strategic choice of preserving neutrality, while overcoming the inevitability for contribution to international peace and security (Ishizuka 2004). New Zealand balances the rationales for contributing to peacekeeping between participating in missions that are legally sanctioned under international law, with more self-interested rationales that have to do with defending strategic interests (New Zealand Government 2013). Another valuable example is Bangladesh, whereby as a small state, is one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping, outnumbering some of the major powers and more traditional contributors. Its primary motivation for peacekeeping is financial gains, followed by the desire to gain international recognition for its goodwill, increase its role within multilateral forms, and improve its image in service of attracting foreign aid and eventual foreign investments (Krishnasamy 2003: 37-38).

Relevant to the Albanian case is the emerging literature on the distinct characteristics of token troop contribution to UN peacekeeping, which shed light on the politics, rationales, and the particularities of small contribution to UN peace operations. Katherine P. Coleman (2013: 51) argues that 'token troop contributions represent a deliberate strategy to spread a state's military resources over more multilateral operations'. This strategy consists of sending a small number of troops to multiple missions and providing more specialised staff that would take leadership and liaison roles as part of larger contingents. Coleman (2013: 56) argues that token contributions expand the available options for states to commit to peacekeeping despite internal constraints, in order to gain access to information circulated within the mission, and multiply their international prestige and influence gained from the participation in widespread missions. However, Coleman (2013: 47) criticizes this practice arguing that it 'hampers ongoing UN efforts to expand the organization's base of (substantial) peacekeeping contributors'.

Albania fulfils the criteria of a token contributor to peacekeeping. It has probably one of the lowest contributions to UN peacekeeping, while it has spread its modest contribution over several missions of UN, NATO, and the EU. Although a member of the UN since 1955, Albania does not have a tradition of providing UN peacekeepers. Even after the fall of communism in 1991, Albania was not an active contributor to UN peacekeeping operations, mainly due to internal difficulties related to institutional reforms, the modernisation of armed forces, and economic underdevelopment. However, during the process of joining NATO and the EU, Albania has given priority to contributing to NATO- and EU-led operations in Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Chad. In relation to UN peacekeeping, Albania has only participated in the mission to Georgia (UNOMIG) and the mission to Chad (MINURCAT). So far, Albania has made available a battalion of Special Forces to peacekeeping operations that have mainly operated in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Chad. Due to limited capabilities, over the past ten years Albanian peacekeepers have participated within the contingents of larger troop-contributing countries, including Germany, Turkey, US, and Italy.

Despite the increasing number of small states participating in peacekeeping, the majority of studies focus on the contribution of great powers, regional hegemons, former colonial powers, concerned neighbours and pivotal states (e.g. Durch 1996; Guttry 2014; Cunliffe 2013). Hence, case studies of small states that contribute to peacekeeping have been insufficiently incorporated to theory-building exercises. Existing theories on peacekeeping vary from realist-inspired accounts to more liberalist, constructivist, and more rationalist and technocratic accounts. Realists consider peacekeeping as mainly a reflection of power politics, advancement of national interest, and an expression of dominant and raising global powers to expand their regional hegemony and assert influence on the world stage. Peacekeeping is seen as a mechanism to mobilize international support for self-interested motives of dominant powers (Rikhye 1974). The enhancement of international prestige through peacekeeping belongs also to realist-inspired accounts (Krishnasmay 2001: 56-76). Liberalist accounts consider peacekeeping as an instrument for the advancement of a stable international order, normative primacy of human rights, and an example of international cooperation among troop contributors (Snidal 1998: 3-32). They assert affirmative correlations between the level of democracy and the level of contribution to peacekeeping (Andersson 2002: 363-386). Liberalist accounts also hold that peacekeeping provides states with political legitimacy and institutional favours within multilateral organizations (Coleman 2007).

Other rationalist accounts hold that peacekeeping provides individual and collective goods, such as halting conflicts and preventing their spill over in the immediate neighbouring or distant regions (Bobrow 1997). Realist, liberalist and rationalist accounts do not explain why small states contribute to peacekeeping, they

have limitations in explaining how interest is formed, capturing the compatibility of providing for peacekeeping with political regimes, and the existence of cases with mixed and conflicting motives for contributing to peacekeeping. In response to the conceptual and empirical limitations of these theoretical accounts on peacekeeping, Bellamy and Williams (2013: 9) recently have suggested a pluralist account of peacekeeping, which proposes exploring the wide variations and rationales for contributing to peacekeeping. Their pluralist account argues that in order to understand why states provide peacekeepers, it is essential to look at five clusters of motivating rationales, related to political, economic, security, institutional, and normative concerns. In addition, Bellamy and Williams argue that situational circumstances change over time, and individual decisions for contributing to particular peace operations need to be accounted for in order to provide more realist analysis of peacekeeping.

While it is not our intention here to join these debates on the motivations behind peacekeeping, we believe that the main source of disagreement between these strands is the different conceptualisation of interests with realists viewing them as stable, given, and material while liberals viewing them as ideational and ever-changing (e.g. Wendt 1999). Each case of contributing for peacekeeping is unique to a particular country, place and time and is obviously shaped by multiple interacting factors, which might not fit a single theoretical strand. Hence, the pluralist account of peacekeeping holds more explanatory power in the context of small states' contribution to peacekeeping as it captures the presence of multiple motives, their development over time and the events that affect them. Seen from a processual point of view, each of the theoretical strands discussed above could bear relevance to different stages of explaining the contribution of a small country to peacekeeping. It is for this reason that a pluralist account is more adequate to complex social reality. Therefore, this article invokes a pluralist understanding of Albania's rationales for contributing to peacekeeping by looking at the contextual factors that shaped Albania's interests. By tracing Albania's elite interest formation to provide for peacekeeping, the article aims to identify the mixed motives that explain the particularities of Albanian contribution to peacekeeping. Pluralist accounts can also be useful to explain why countries like Albania are more prone to contributing to NATO and EU led military operations rather than follow the traditional practice of contributing to UN peacekeeping.

### **The revival of Albanian state identity: from consumer to producer of security**

To understand why Albania has become a token contributor to peacekeeping requires looking back at the country's political development over the past decades to explore its transformation from a consumer of security to an exporter of

peace and stability in the region and abroad. As with the most of small states, identity politics were crucial for Albania's return to the international community (Browning 2006). Communist legacies and insecurities during the democratic transitions have profoundly shaped Albania's attitude towards perceiving itself and the other (Tismaneanu 2009). Before becoming a net contributor, throughout the 1990s, Albania was a net beneficiary of international peacekeeping. This section looks at the key developments that shaped Albanian state identity and triggered its commitment to peacekeeping as a way to advance national interest and regain international status.

### *Military Reform to Overcome the Communist Legacy and State Fragility*

Albania experienced the most totalitarian communist regime of Eastern Europe. When communism fell, Albania had almost half its population directly or indirectly involved with the military, over 200,000 bunkers spread across the country, a vast arsenal of armaments, over 3000 military installations, and a fully politicised military leadership. Consequently, after the fall of communism military reform was seen as crucial to Albania's democratisation, openness towards the West, for debunking the communists' narrative of armed struggle as Albania's only tool of national interest preservation. From the very beginning, the legacies of the communist regime were important in framing, legitimating and shaping military reform. In this context, NATO integration was seen as the most efficient way to address such legacy. From early on military reform and NATO accession were presented as interconnected elements, which would ensure the consolidation of Albania's democracy. That is why, to justify military reform, which had a high social and economic cost, Albania's first post-communist president, Sali Berisha, insisted that military reform was necessary for a fuller engagement with the West and for overall democratisation (Rilindja Demoratike 1992: 3).

The rationale of military reform, to overcome the communist legacy of isolation and military politicisation through NATO cooperation, reached a new level of public support when Albania began its first involvement in international peacekeeping in Bosnia in 1996. While other participating countries were reluctant and worried about the safety of their soldiers, in Albania there was overall happiness over the country's participation, which was seen as a sign of military reform success and increased engagement with the world from which they were closed off a few years earlier (Arbnori 1996). Some went as far as to argue that military reform could be deemed successful as Albania had been able to 'democratise the military [...] following the American example of civilian control and transparency' (Koha Jone 1996a: 4). Overall, Albania's participation in international peacekeeping was identified as proof of the success of military reform and Albania's transformation

to an exporter of security. To this point, while analysing military reform in parliament, one deputy stated:

The deployment of our peacekeeping forces in Bosnia and the other activities under the partnership-for-peace framework will increase the international authority of the government and transform Albania from a consumer to a producer of security. These events are crucial for the consolidation of our democracy (Lazimi 1996).

So, during Albania's early transition, military reform was shaped by the desire to overcome the communist legacy of military politicisation and political isolation by democratising the armed forces and cooperating with NATO. Increasingly cooperation with NATO was viewed in light of its new role in peacekeeping in the Balkans. Therefore, in the mid-1990s despite the sharp political disagreements present among Albania's political elite, there was a pan-political agreement that military reform was necessary to overcome the communist legacy, democratise the country, and join NATO (Koha Jone 1996c). To achieve these goals and undertake a successful military reform, participation in international peacekeeping was agreed upon as an appropriate mechanism through which to strengthen the relationship with NATO, overcome the communist legacy of isolation and improve the international image of the country (Koha Jone 1996b: 2).

However, when it seemed that military reform and Albania's nascent participation in peacekeeping operations were on the right track, a major domestic crisis derailed Albania's democratisation and wiped out almost the entire progress of military reform. The situation deteriorated to the point that in March 1997 a state of emergency was declared and the military was called to restore order. The involvement of the military had the opposite effect since the military refused to obey orders, disintegrated, abandoned its weaponry, and the country fell into anarchy. When Albania seemed on the brink of a civil war with a destroyed military and inexistent police force, the government asked for international assistance to re-establish public order. The international community deployed the Operation 'Alba' and decided to send in thousands of troops (Marchio 2000). This was the first time Albania relied on an international peacekeeping force to help in the establishment of public order. The decision to send in troops was greeted enthusiastically by the Albanian government (ATA 1997). Remarkably, while Albania welcomed the approval of a peacekeeping mission there, Albanian troops were serving in Bosnia to assist with the implementation of the Dayton agreement there. So, because of the 1997 crisis, Albania, within a year, was transformed from a nascent security contributor, to a major security consumer where the international community had to send an armed force to assist in the re-establishment of order and distribution of aid. Despite cutting off reform and rolling back Albania's initial successes, the



1997 crisis and the international community's intervention through an armed peacekeeping force, further reinforced the initial framing of military reform as crucial for Albania's stability and essential for democratic consolidation.

### *Regional instability during 1990s*

Not long after 'Alba' operation left Albania, the country was confronted with another wave of crisis, which endangered Albania's sovereignty and could engulf it in a war that it could neither win nor refuse to fight. Three conflicts took part, which involved Albanians living in Kosovo, southern Serbia, and neighbouring Macedonia. These crises threatened to destabilise the region and further deteriorate Albania's precarious security situation. However, they also provided Albania an opportunity to gradually restore confidence in its armed forces and strengthen the institutional cooperation with NATO, which later facilitated Albania's contribution to NATO's military operations. Albania's further alignment with NATO came during the 1999 Kosovo conflict (Godo 1998). At the peak of the Kosovo conflict, the Albanian foreign minister called upon 'NATO member countries to help Albania with military and humanitarian infrastructure to cope with a possible aggression from Serbia' (ATA 1999a). The international community, especially NATO replied positively by stating that, 'the Alliance will very seriously consider any attack by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia against your country [Albania]. The alliance has repeatedly made clear that the security of each of the NATO members is inseparably linked with that of all the nations of the Partnership', part of which was Albania (ATA 1999d).

After the conflict in Kosovo ended, public opinion in Albania approved intensifying 'military reform to reach NATO standards and join the Alliance', while considering NATO's humanitarian intervention in Kosovo as a definitive moment which solidified the already excellent cooperation between Albania and NATO (Zeri i Popullit 2000: 3). NATO's Kosovo campaign and Albania's inability to defend itself were clear indications that military reform had to be rethought and that NATO membership had to become, once again, a priority. The understanding that Albania and NATO had 'fought' and won together the Kosovo war in the interest of peace reawakened the Albanian government's aspirations to become a producer of security. For example, in a meeting with NATO's Secretary General PM Majko stated, 'Albania has backed NATO operations in the Balkan region making NATO not only a military but also a political factor [...] The Albanian government is determined to continue being a factor of stability in the region ready to pay the cost for safeguarding the stability of other regional countries (ATA 1999b). This same willingness was shown during a meeting with the German chancellor during which the PM stated that Albania was embracing its constructive role in the Balkans (ATA 1999c).

This spirit of cooperation between Albania and NATO continued also during the crisis in Presevo valley in the Albanian-dominated southern Serbia, and later in 2001 conflict in Macedonia. Although in both cases ethnic Albanians were engaged in the immediate neighbours of Albania, the government preserved its constructive policy of promoting NATO's peaceful resolution of these conflicts. In response to these events, Albania proposed the establishment of the Adriatic Charter between itself, Croatia and Macedonia as a regional security initiative to improve regional cooperation and promote democratic reforms and further NATO integration (Kim 2005: 15). These multiple crises and the extensive military intervention of the international community affected the worldview of Albania's political elite and their relationship with NATO. Until 1997 military reform and the desire to join NATO were viewed as tools to democratise the country. After 1999 Albania had witnessed first-hand, both the positive and negative, effects the military could have on its future. In 1997 they saw how the political use of the military almost destroyed the country. In addition the robust intervention of the international community both in 1997 and 1999, demonstrated that a well-structured military was essential to internal stability and could be instrumental in spreading stability and prosperity in the world. Moreover, the events in Presevo Valley and Macedonia increased Albania's confidence on a peacekeeping agenda.

### *Opportunities for peacekeeping after 9/11*

Besides the mostly symbolic participation in SFOR's mission in Bosnia and UNOMIG in Georgia, during the 1990s Albania did not have the capacity and political commitment to participate in international peacekeeping missions. However, in the 2000s, after the domestic conditions improved and the bipartisan agreement on military reform solidified, Albania was more willing to participate in international peacekeeping. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, the opportunity arose for Albania to participate in missions such as Afghanistan and Iraq. These wars provided Albania with an opportunity to both repay the debt it owed the international community for its interventions in 1997 and 1999 and improve its national image. Therefore, Albania's political elite, especially the parliament, used the 9/11 attacks to reiterate their willingness to become security producers and use international peacekeeping missions to carve a new place for Albania in international affairs. Such position, it was hoped, would also advance the country's prospects for Euro-Atlantic integrations (Shehi 2001). In addition, the chairman stated that Albania as a troubled young democracy had to improve its image by pre-emptively discrediting accusations that it was a Muslim non-democratic country.

Hence, Albania's participation in NATO's mission in Afghanistan (ISAF) was presented as both a pragmatic decision and as an ideological positioning to create a new image of the Albanian state. All deputies regardless of political alliances supported

this rationale as they argued that Albania's participation in the Afghan campaign would be a boost for the country's image and its ability to be a factor of stability (Zogaj 2011). Similarly to the Afghan debate, the entire political spectrum was in favour of Albania's participation in the Iraq war based on the need to express gratitude for the help received in the 1990s, the pragmatic awareness that such participation would increase the chances of joining NATO (Mediu 2003). Moreover, Albania's increased participation in international peacekeeping missions in Afghanistan and Iraq was seen as a sign of the success of military reform towards NATO membership and of Albania's renewed push to become a security producer. That is why PM Nano referred to troops going to Afghanistan as, 'the forward flank of Albania's de jure acceptance into NATO' (Zeri i Popullit 2003:4). Similarly, one year later, while analysing the progress of military reform and Albania's increased participation in international peacekeeping, the pro-government newspaper Zeri i Popullit stated:

We are all aware that in 1997 the military was destroyed. All military depots were looted and the weapons fell prey of destruction. In 1997 our military had no leadership at all and the Minister of Defence got on a boat and asked for political asylum in Italy [...] Today the Albanian military is side by side NATO in a number of training and peacekeeping missions all around the globe (2004: 8).

So, while in the other countries participating in Afghanistan and Iraqi operations caused a fervent debate, in Albania such participation was viewed as a way to demonstrate that the military had reformed, that Albania had overcome the legacies of the past, and that it had become a full and responsible member of the democratic club of nations. This explains why, when Albania was presented the opportunity to take on a role in international peacekeeping, it viewed it as an instrument to pay back its debts to the international community, improve its security situation, and remake its image as a Western-style democracy which supported freedom. The extensive assistance provided to Albania during its democratic transition by the Euro-Atlantic community influenced Albania's political commitment to various peacekeeping operations. Hence, providing for peacekeeping was seen by the Albanian political spectrum as a way to repay the various external actors for their role in promoting stability, democracy, and prosperity in Albania.

## **The politics and rationales for contributing to international peacekeeping**

Albania's transformation from a consumer of security in the 1990s to an exporter of stability in the 2000s is remarkable. Overall, as demonstrated above, Albania's contribution to peacekeeping is related to the national consensus to institutionalise

its armed and security forces, overcome the deleterious legacies of communism and tumultuous democratic transition, the expression of Albania's commitment to uphold NATO's military standards, and the preservation of Albania's stability on its path to EU membership. It is these in-ward looking aspects that affected Albania's strategic stance towards supporting NATO, instead of UN-led peacekeeping operations. Accordingly, there are three prevailing political rationales for Albania's contribution to peacekeeping operations: (1) reforming and modernising the armed forces for integration into NATO and the EU structures; (2) contributing to regional peace and stability; and (3) restoring the international prestige of the country. The diversity of these three factors exemplify the necessity for a pluralist take on understanding the contextual circumstance for contributing to peacekeeping as well as illustrate the fact that within a realm of events and a particular subject of inquiry there is space for realist, liberalist, critical, and constructivist perspectives for explaining more accurately different aspects of providing for peacekeeping practices.

### *Reforming the armed forces to join NATO*

All the events identified above, shaped Albanian military reform and willingness to be a token contributor to international peacekeeping. Since the 1990s were marked by security, and especially military-related crises, one of the main priorities of Albania's democratic transition was reforming the armed forces to become a factor of stability at home and abroad. From Albania's perspective, the relation between reforming the armed forces and providing for peacekeeping was mutually constitutive. While reforming armed forces is a requirement for effective participation in peacekeeping missions, equally contribution to peacekeeping contributes to reforming the armed forces and increasing their capabilities. So it is a two-way process, which is constantly raised in Albanian policy documents and political discourse. Reforming the armed forces is also essential for NATO's new strategy to mobilise its small members to contribute to peacekeeping, stability operations, and war-fighting operations.

These rationales were present in Albania's 2004 National Security Strategy. The strategy stated that defence reform is linked with the adjustment to a new security environment and the response to contribute to new missions, tasks, and roles for armed forces and is congruent with the standards of Euro-Atlantic collective defence structures (National Security Strategy of Albania 2004: 5). During the 63<sup>rd</sup> UN General Assembly session in 2008, Albania's President stated that: 'Albania is working to enhance the domestic capacities to greater presence aiding global peace and security by deepening the cooperation with the United Nations in the field of peacekeeping operations' (Topi 2008) Similarly, the 2014 Defence Directive

identifies Albania's contribution to peacekeeping operations as an incentive to improve its human resources and recruitment policies to increase the quality of troops sent to peacekeeping operations abroad, thereby improving the overall operational capability for participating in international missions (Ministry of Defence of Albania 2014a). It is indeed that case that Albanian armed forces have benefited from participating in peacekeeping missions by gaining new skills and capacities for battlefield combat and administering military operations (Mbrotjta 2013: 9).

Albania is currently undertaking further reforms to uphold the obligations derived from NATO membership. As part of this process, Albania is finalizing the comprehensive modernization of its armed forces, to make them more effective and capable of contributing to NATO, EU and UN operations abroad. Modernizing Albania's armed forces entails improving the institutional command and control, enhancing the management of information, improving defensive capabilities, and the modernization of the army. This is a response to multiple allegations of corruption, misconduct and unprofessional management within the Albanian defence sector over the past two decades. Although this is not a national issue at the moment, the rate of Albanian women participating in peacekeeping operations is very low.

One of the main reasons for contributing to peacekeeping was Albania's desire to join NATO and the subsequent obligation derived from membership once in NATO. NATO has placed crisis management and peacekeeping as one of the core activities of its renewed security strategy in the last two decades. To respond to this policy, in the past decade, Albania has participated in NATO-led military operations, especially the ISAF in Afghanistan with 211 troops under Turkish and Italian command, as well as the US-led Joint Coalition in Iraq, where Albania provided 215 troops between 2003 and 2008. As of June 2014, Albania has 72 troops as part of ISAF in Afghanistan and provided a modest contribution to NATO's peacekeeping mission in Kosovo. Albania's preference for NATO- and US-led missions is in line with its national interest of full integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, for which there is nation-wide consensus as well as tangible institutional and political benefits.

In accordance with such interests, the Albanian Ministry of Defence relates Albania's engagement in peacekeeping missions to its commitments within the framework of NATO membership and EU integration process (Ministry of Defence of Albania 2014c). In addition, aware of the political weight that the US carries within NATO, Albania strategically aligned its foreign and security policy with the United States' war on terrorism and coalition-based military interventions. Albania showed active commitment and compliance within all US-led missions, as evident with its largest contribution to ISAF in Afghanistan and the US-led

coalition in Iraq. As a result, Albania's contribution to NATO-led peacekeeping remains one of the key factors in the US diplomatic discourse towards Albania. US diplomats constantly have levelled Albania's contribution to peacekeeping with the US support for Albania's further integration in the Euro-Atlantic structures, while highlighting the necessity for further defence reforms (Ushtria 2014). Similar discourse is also from Albanian side. When Albania joined NATO in 2009, it had not reached all the criteria for full integration in the Alliance. It took Albania four years to complete full integration into NATO. A linkage between reaching full capabilities and contributing to peacekeeping missions was evident, showing Albania commitment to international peace and security.

Albania also considers that its modest contribution to NATO, EU, and UN peacekeeping operations serves to advance core values of Euro-Atlantic community, which peace, security, development, human rights, and democracy. This logic has been integrated into Albania's foreign and security policy, serving as an asset to contribute to the Euro-Atlantic community it recently joined. The address given by Albania's President to the 67<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly session in 2012 echoes neatly Albania's normative rationales, maintaining that:

With its foreign policy of peace and good relations with all other countries, its modest but important contribution in international missions of peace and human rights protection through its good neighbourly policy as well as moderate and constructive role in the region, Albania has turned into a producer and direct contributor of stability and security in regional and global scales (Nishani 2014: 4-5).

Since Albania joined NATO in 2009, it has recalibrated its peacekeeping contributions by participating in a number of EU-led missions. Such re-calibration is in line with its strategic goal of EU integration. In 2012, Albania signed an agreement with the EU to participate in European crisis management missions. Albania's participation in EU's crisis management operations seeks to strengthen the institutional ties between the two (EU Council 2012). So far Albania has contributed to EU's mission in Bosnia (ALTHEA) with 12 military personnel and in EUFOR Tchad/RCA with 63 troops between 2008 and 2010, as well as the participation in the EU NAVFOR Atalanta Operation in Somalia (European Commission 2012). EU institutions have recognized Albania's participation in EU crisis management missions. The 2010 Progress Report highlighted that 'Albania is ready to participate actively in different civil and military crisis management missions' (European Commission 2010: 117). The EU also acknowledges the alignment of Albania with the majority of EU statements in the area of foreign policy and security (European Commission 2009: 5). In 2011, the EU considered

the contribution of Albania within EU's crisis management operations as a progress in 'align[ing] itself with the EU *acquis* in the field of common security and defence policy. Overall, preparations in this field are on track' (European Commission 2011: 66). Hence, in general the EU considered Albania's participation to EU crisis management operations as 'a step towards more structured cooperation between the EU and Albania in the field of security' (EU Press Release 2012).

In addition, the extensive assistance provided to Albania during its democratic transition by the Euro-Atlantic community of states and institutions has influenced Albania's political commitment to various peacekeeping operations. Hence, providing for peacekeeping is seen by the Albanian political and military spectrum as a way to repay the various external actors for their indispensable role in promoting stability, democracy, and prosperity in Albania. Beyond this, Albania has enshrined within its defence policy the principle of collective responsibility to peacefully resolve conflicts based on the international rule of law, and joint peacekeeping operations (Document of Defence Policy 2000). However, this normative discourse is framed to balanced the international acceptable standards, and cover the more obvious national interests.

### *Contributing to regional stability*

Besides its domestic rationales, the on-going and inter-related ethnic grievances in the Balkans and especially the 1999 Kosovo conflict, have hardened the view among Albania's military and political leadership that armed forces should serve to support international peace, stability, and prosperity in the region and further afield. Accordingly, the security situation in the Balkans has influenced Albania's defence policy, where it intends to pre-empt potential national and transnational threats by creating a professional armed force, while benefitting from NATO's collective security. In this regard, Albania considers that through its peacekeeping capability it can play a role in resolving regional geopolitical problems, while simultaneously reflecting its peace-loving character (Mbrotjta 2012: 15). Albania considers that joining the Euro-Atlantic structures of collective security and defence has contributed to consolidating internal stability and prosperity as well as promoting regional peace. Hence, as indicated in the 2004 National Security Strategy, contributing to peacekeeping missions is also an indicator of Albania's internal stability and a reassuring message that Albania does not pose a threat to its neighbours (National Security Strategy of Albania 2004).

Albania has used its NATO integration to promote herself both as a responsible state and as a factor of peace and stability in the region. All Albanian governments have stressed this new image to undo the memories of Albania as a source of illegal immigration, crime and contraband in the 1990s. After joining NATO in 2009,

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintained that, ‘after joining NATO in 2009 and becoming more integrated in regional security initiatives, Albania has gained a new status in international relations’ (Albanian MFA 2014d). Albanian president highlighted this new role when he argued that ‘by continuing to work for peace and stability in the region, Albania helps NATO and the Balkans’ (President of Albania 2013). In its efforts to strengthen regional stability, Albania is part of the Multinational Peace Force Southeastern Europe (SEEBRIG), which was established in 1999 with the purpose of increasing the security cooperation in the region, strengthening trust, and enhancing good neighbourly relations between the countries in Southeast Europe. As a result of this engagement, one of the areas of SEEBRIG is supporting peace operations led by UN, NATO, EU, or OSCE (Ministry of Defence of Albania 2014b). This regional peacekeeping force was deployed for the first time in Afghanistan in 2006 as part of ISAF. So the multitudinous purposes of this mechanism intersects the intention of NATO and the EU to build peace in the region by enhancing joint security operations, by utilizing regional military resources for their peace missions, while exercise conditionality to these countries part of SEEBRIG in the process of Euro-Atlantic integration.

### *Enhancing international prestige and image*

Beyond the key rationales outline above, Albania considers its modest contribution to peacekeeping a matter of national pride, an attempt to enhance its international prestige, and a reflection of its commitment to international freedom, peace, and security. Previous Prime Minister Sali Berisha echoed in 2006 that ‘Albania’s participation in this very respected club [NATO], in the most successful political and military Alliance in all times, sometimes makes our small countries gain prestige and the right to transmit powerfully through this forum its voice and its vision for a more secure world’ (Berisha 2006: 67). Albania takes pride from the fact that as a small state takes part in NATO-led peacekeeping operations together with more powerful allies and partners (Mbrotjta 2014: 9). On the occasion of 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Albania’s membership to NATO, Prime Minister Edi Rama stated that:

Our defence forces have engaged in close cooperation with our allies for security in the peace and integrity of our country, regional security, of our Alliance, even through contributing to global peace and security. I want benefit from this opportunity to salute our soldiers in missions abroad, who are the clearest symbol of our country’s membership in the Alliance (Ushtria 2014).

Besides its intention to improve international image, peacekeeping serves Albania domestically as well. As a result of participating to peacekeeping operations and



are active member of NATO, Albanian Armed Forces enjoy wide public support. Specifically, the Albanian contribution to peacekeeping has increased domestic sympathy for the armed forces. A recent poll shows that 51% of Albanian citizens trust the armed forces and NATO (PASOS 2014). Another local survey shows that around 30% of Albanians has a positive opinion on the contribution of Albania to peacekeeping (IDM 2009: 94). Although a symbolic rationale, Albania's framing of its peacekeeping contribution with improving of international image signifies that in practice both realist and constructivist accounts co-exist and provide congruent explanations.

## **Conclusion and implications**

Albania represents a clear case of an unintended peacekeeper, whose contribution to peace operations is a means to achieve other more immediate national interests. As illustrated in this article, Albania's interest in peacekeeping came out of a slow process of identity construction and interest-maximisation. After the fall of communism Albania's new elite viewed military reform as crucial for democratisation and re-joining the European community from which the communist regime had severed ties. From this perspective joining NATO and assisting in its missions was the leitmotif of the early 1990s. Such cooperation ensured the progress of military reform, Albania's entry into an exclusive club of Western democracies and transformed the country into an exporter of security. After the 1997 crisis and 1999 Kosovo war Albania became even more connected to NATO and military reform became even more important. These two crises had shown the importance of military reform for democratic consolidation and national security. In addition, the international community's and especially NATO's intervention helped Albanians solidify the desire to join the Alliance, and also created a desire to pay back a debt of gratitude and by so doing transform the country's image and remake Albania into a 'normal' European state. All these elements shaped Albania's will to spend its limited financial means, use its scarce political capital, and rely on its very finite resources to pursue a difficult and expensive military reform to then engage in complex and dangerous international peacekeeping missions. As far as they were concerned, this altruism was the most effective way in which they could pursue their legitimate interests of democratic consolidation, security maximisation and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Accordingly, this article has shown how Albania has utilised peacekeeping to overcome the vulnerabilities of its communist past, integrate in regional security communities, and enhance its international position. One of the national interests and core foreign policy goals of Albania is integration in Euro-Atlantic structures.

Both NATO and the EU are growing their ambitions and role for peacekeeping, - both in their own terms - to strengthen, renew, and reconstitute their agency in global affairs. As a result, they are increasingly making contribution to their own peacekeeping operations as a condition for membership. This explains why Albania has focused its contribution mainly to NATO- and EU-led peace operations. Contributing to peacekeeping for Albania has been a task of ticking a box in the Euro-Atlantic integration. In addition, parallel to this externally set conditionality, Albania has exploited peacekeeping for reconstructing its identity and national pride, as well as enhancing its role in regional affairs. Thus, peacekeeping has provided Albania a suitable avenue for enhancing national interests, reconstructing state identity, and increasing its regional and international role.

Notwithstanding these rationales, the motives of small states for contributing to international peacekeeping will remain diverse and subject to different interpretations. The implications from Albania's rationales in participating in international peacekeeping are numerous. First, small states like Albania might become increasingly willing to contribute to peacekeeping to enhance their own security and remake their image. This in turn might increase stability and lower the likelihood of states behaving belligerently. Second, while the UN has so far been the go-to place for peacekeeping, the regional integrationist forces might push states to become unintended contributors to peacekeeping as a proxy for entering exclusive clubs of advanced nations. Lastly, Albania's case implies that a state's immediate interest for integration, security maximisation and identity reconstruction might enable it to act in theatres where at first glance it has no identifiable interest. That is why Albania sent troops to Chad and Somalia despite the fact that developments there posed no threat to Albania's political and economic interests.

The final and most important point is that Albania's double-edged contribution to peacekeeping reveals the implications for the prospects of peacekeeping, of the politics of regional alliances, and the ethics of external intervention. Although the UN remains the main global peacekeeper, the rise of regional peacekeepers defuses the potential for governing peacekeeping globally, as each peacekeeping organisation has its own doctrine, strategies, and interests. In this regard, small states are critical in shifting the grounds of peacekeeping dynamics. This is related to the politics of regional alliances. Political and security alliances like NATO and recently the EU and the African Union utilise peacekeeping as a means to strengthen their global agency, reduce dependency on UN's complex multilateralism, redefine the nature of global security, and accumulate political support and legitimacy for their actions. Although Albania has not provided substantial contribution to peacekeeping, its engagement with NATO and EU missions has legitimised their endeavours at the expense of global multilateral peacekeeping. So, small states like Albania serve larger global security regimes not as much as raw material but as a source of increasing legitimacy and enlargement of regional alliances.

Nevertheless, as this article has focused on the domestic utilisation of peacekeeping, we could clearly see how local agents and their political discourse disregards these global dynamics, to which Albania unintentionally contributes. Most importantly, because of Albania's self-interest, the ethics of intervention are not questioned either by the political elite, civil society or the broader society. Certainly, the harm caused in Iraq, Afghanistan and other places where Albania has participated with troops is never problematised. Instead, the discourse of exporting freedom, peace, and security has nurtured the self-interested altruism of Albanians, ignoring the lack of accountability for the potential human rights abuses and collective responsibility for harming civilians in conflict-affected areas where Albanian peacekeepers have participated. The primacy of self-interest has also kept away the fear of bringing instability in the country as a result of potential terrorist retaliation for joining the US, NATO, and the EU in military operations abroad.

The rationales and implications examined in this article show the limits of grand theories of peacekeeping and the necessity to promote pluralist perspectives that account for complexity, contingency, and multiplicity of rationales of small states' conduct in international relations. The prevailing discourses that small states are samaritans of global peace need to be challenged with more contextual accounts - as presented in this article - shedding light on the self-interest of small states in peacekeeping and their absence of reflexive and critical stance towards the ethics of global interventionism.

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