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ALBANIAN AND EUROPEAN IDENTITIES

Perspectives in Communication, Education and Culture

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Albanian and European Identities ⎯⎯

Perspectives in Communication, Education and Culture

⎯⎯ ***Associate Professor Dr. Belina BUDINI*** ⎯⎯⎯

In this issue of Polis Journal *(number 22/2)* we are focusing on the Albanian and European Identities. Papers reflect upon perspectives in the fields of Communication, Education, International Relations, and Cultural studies. Albania, as a candidate country for membership of the European Union, has made some progress in aligning its laws and regulations with the EU "Acquis Communautaire". However, challenges remain, particularly in the areas of democratic institutional building. Political and civil society actors are brought into question in the article by Mirela Bogdani emphasizing the lack of legitimacy and the unreliability of political parties and other domestic actors, that have increasingly amplified the importance of the International Community as an external actor in Albania. From within a critical stance, she argues that the inability of local actors to deal with domestic challenges and cooperate with one another have 'promoted' this actor, which has been trying to fulfill the role of facilitator and mediator that the state institutions have proved unable to perform. The article focuses on the role of the International Community as a pivotal and reliable actor in democratic transition in Albania, analyzing the role of various actors in the democratization process in Albania, with specific emphasis on one key participant which has played a significant role throughout the three-decade transition period. Therefore, the paper argues that legitimacy in Albania lies with the international community and its verdict tends to be considered as final. Furthermore, the author analyses the impact and influence exerted by the two most significant external actors: the European Union, because of Albania's aspirational EU membership, steering reforms and providing financial assistance; and the United States, which, through its diplomats and ambassadors, has been very proactive in Albanian politics, helping the country to overcome persistent problems as corruption and organized crime, and more

recently the judiciary reform. The paper concludes that Albanian road towards democratization could have had a different trajectory without the involvement and guidance of the international community pushing for and directing reforms. While acknowledging the significance of assistance from external driving forces, the article suggests that the primary onus for the progress of a country should rest upon its domestic actors.

Touching upon the topic of the EU Enlargement, Malvina Tema reflects on the relations between European Union and Turkey and the challenges of the European Union further enlargement. Her paper is an effort to investigate the principal challenges associated with further enlargement of the European Union with a specific focus of the analysis in the case of Turkey that represents a dilemma for the EU. These concerns relate to political, economic, cultural, and geostrategic questions that are perceived as crucial issues for the Union. The author points out that despite the EU willingness, it plays an important part how Turkey will play the game of integration which. The article introduces political, economic, geostrategic and identity cultural challenges regarding the EU enlargement towards Turkey.

In their article about the relationship between Media Communication and Education, Dritan Idrizi and Tomi Treska bring an ethical perspective. Their work relates on two different but intertwined disciplines to explore the ethical standards behind advertising for children in Albania. Their study focuses the advertisements on the audio-visual media that have a national license, and that advertise various products of different companies during the advertising spaces. The method used in this case study is the observational method - the monitoring of the national TV media stations during time slots. They argue that advertisements in time slots, in which children are actively watching television, are not in accordance with the ethics that are trumpeted by the law on pre-university education and the law on audio-visual broadcasts.

Kejvin Jaku contributes to this issue with his work as a student of Communication in the Faculty of Humanities, Education and Liberal Arts. He reflects upon democracy in Albania and the navigation of economic, social and media obstacles in the post-communist era. His essay identifies the economic repercussions of communist governance, including prevalent unemployment and fragile market structures exploring the social impact, linking them to issues like suppression, fear, and weakened trust in government. It suggests targeted strategies for the government to strengthen democratic institutions.

From within an empirical researched approach, Redona Zhuleku and Elsida Sinaj bring a psychological discussion on burnout, stress and social support studying QSUT nurses in Albania. Their research conducted on nurses reveals that in emerging nations, burnout-related work issues are becoming more prevalent in professions like nursing. This essentially means that managers and supervisors in

the medical, administrative, and nursing fields place several contradicting demands on nurses in their professions. Their quantitative study sets out to investigate if QSUT nurses experience Burnout, Stress, and Social Support. Their study results for regression/stress at work supported the hypothesis that levels of social support (social integration, support for your values) are associated with burnout variables and social integration is the most important factor affecting increased stress at work.

The final work presented in this issue is a book review on the novel by the Albanian writer Fatos Kongoli with the title "Ivory Dragon". Ermir Nika sets out to evaluate how China is revitalized through memory in this novel. He suggests that all the deformations of living as well as the occasional contrasts are arranged somewhat carelessly: the permanent pressure exerted by the wild discipline, the silent temptations, but also the spiritual and psychological related disturbances that one experiences during the experience of first love. At the same time, some elements and phenomena make up a somewhat separate world, forged by events and people who leave behind indelible traces, imbued with pronounced notes of lyricism and drama at the same time, gradually transforming into shadows of the past that haunts the protagonist of this novel on his way back from Beijing to Tirana, but also that of his departure years later from Tirana to Paris, to crucify the main character forever in the memory.

The role of the International Community as a pivotal and reliable actor in democratic transition in Albania!

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Abstract

The paper analyses the role of various actors in the democratization process in Albania, with specific emphasis on one key participant. It is structured into three distinctive sections: the first identifies the domestic actors in the beginning of transition, such as the political class, civil society, knowledge elite, media etc, highlighting the political class as the most powerful and influential of them. However, the paper argues that instead of being a reliable and responsible factor in the process of democratization and integration, the Albanian political elite has shown a chronic lack of responsibility, willingness, professionalism and commitment to tackle the country's major problems. Its primary objective has been its own self-interest and self-preservation. On the other hand, since Albania opened up to the world, another actor has been crucial for the country, the international community. The subsequent section focuses on this external actor, which has played a significant role throughout the three-decade transition period. It asserts that inability of local actors to deal with domestic challenges and cooperate with one another have 'promoted' this actor, which has been trying to fulfill the role of facilitator and mediator that the state institutions have proved

unable to perform. The lack of legitimacy and the unreliability of political parties and other domestic actors have increasingly amplified the importance of this actor. Therefore, the paper argues that legitimacy in Albania lies with the international community and its verdict tends to be considered as final. This is also reflected in public opinion surveys, indicating that Albanian citizens trust much more international than national institutions. The third section analyses the impact and influence exerted by the two most significant external actors: the European Union, whose significance escalated notably post-2000 owing to Albania's aspirational EU membership, steering reforms and providing financial assistance; and the United States, which, through its diplomats and ambassadors, has been very proactive in Albanian politics, helping the country to overcome persistent problems as corruption and organized crime, and more recently the judiciary reform. The paper concludes that Albanian road towards democratization could have had a different trajectory without the involvement and guidance of the international community pushing for and directing reforms. While acknowledging the significance of assistance from external driving forces, the primary onus for the progress of a country should rest upon its domestic actors.

Keywords: *International community, domestic actors, political class, transition, democratization, European integration, the European Union, the United States.*

Methodology

Introduction

Albania emerged from communism with no traditions of capitalism and democracy, unlike some of the other transition countries which embarked on the 'era of changes' with varying potential levels of these traditions. It endured the most totalitarian regime among the Eastern Bloc countries. The communist society was not a fertile breeding ground for political democracy and the creation of a vigorous civil society. Consequently, the collapse of communism found Albania without a political and civic pluralism, with the Party of Labor being the sole political actor during the five decades of communist rule. Albania was experiencing democracy for the first time in its history and was clearly the country with the longest journey to travel from a rigid Stalinism to democracy. "Of all the former communist countries, Albania appeared least prepared for the painful transition from dictatorship to a pluralist democracy and a market economy", pointed out Biberaj (1998:149). The long and short political, historical, social and economic legacies of centralized, authoritarian rule and economic

underdevelopment placed serious impediments in the way of rapid and smooth democratization of the Albanian polity. Albania's task of overcoming this legacy and 'catching up' with the West was therefore immense, even compared to other former communist states.

However, soon in the early stages of the transition, Albania started to witness the emergence of a pluralistic society. This shift marked a departure from the mono-party system, ushering in political pluralism, characterized by the establishment of multiple political parties. Concurrently, numerous civic actors and organizations began to emerge, gaining a foothold in the realm of policy-making.

Against this background, there are a couple of research questions raised, which will be explored in this paper.

Research questions & Variables

Who were the domestic actors during the transition in Albania? Which one has been the most influential and important among them? Why the domestic actors and political class did not become truly reliable and responsible factors in the process of democratization and integration? Did the international community, as an external actor, fulfill the role that the other domestic actors have proved unable to perform? And has it played the most significant role throughout the three-decade transition period of Albania? Which were the most significant external actors pushing for and directing reforms? Why Albanian citizens trust more international than national institutions?

I have identified the respective variables, which will help in analyzing and answering the above research questions: firstly, the dependent variable, which is the democratic transition period in Albania; and secondly the independent variable, i.e., the role of the International Community as a pivotal and reliable actor. Other secondary independent variables might be considered the domestic actors, including civil society, knowledge elite, media etc, with the political class as the most important of them.

Literature review & Added value

There is a vast literature on Albanian transition, democratization and Europeanisation, both from international and Albanian scholars (M. Vickers, J. Pettifer, J. Loughlin, Sh. Rama, M. Bogdani, E. Biberaj, B. Kajsiu, A. Bumçi, A. Rakipi, etc). Similarly, the examination of domestic actors, particularly Albanian political parties, within these processes, has received likewise thorough attention in scholarly discourse. However, the analysis of the influence and role of external

actors throughout the 30 years of democratic transition remains an underexplored domain. It must be said, that as the most extensively studied among external actors, remains the role of the European Union. Consequently, a substantive body of literature addressing the broader spectrum of external actors in this context is yet to materialize. This paper seeks to address this lacuna and aims to contribute in filling this vacuum in the exciting literature. I, therefore, do hope to come up with some novel scientific evidence, arguments, and conclusions to enhance our understanding of the external actors' impact during the three decades of democratic transition in Albania.

Method & Type of case-study & Data

The method used in this study is the Qualitative. Within this, the method chosen is the "Content Analysis" of the secondary literature. This is a "single case study", as it focuses on the analysis of the phenomenon/issue in one country, Albania. With regard to the data, it is mainly collection and analyses of secondary data from studies (books and articles) of renowned authors and scholars in the areas of democratization, transition and Europeanisation, reports and analysis of international organisations (European Commission, Council of Europe, European Parliament, UNDP, International Crisis Group, International Republican Institute, etc.), as well as articles from prominent newspapers, such as *Sunday Times, Deutche Velle, The Huffington Post, Reuters, Transition Online, Balkan Insight, Euro-News Albania* etc.

The domestic actors in the beginning of democratic transition

In the early years of transition, the Albanian decision-makers, as Bogdani and Loughlin (2007:174) argue, were either 'policy virgins' catapulted fresh into positions of power, starting to learn how to govern in unfamiliar settings, or those from the communist regime who had to unlearn old policy ways and learn new ones. An Albanian political analyst, Shinasi Rama (2004), described the Albanian elite of the first decade of transition in quite a pejorative way by saying, "The elite of Tirana has started a mad race to become artificially noble, forgetting that nobility can only be gained by and expressed through service and sacrifice towards the people. This so-called elite, which governs the Albanian state today, lacks every feature of nobility. The most powerful and influential elite group in Albania, the political elite, is composed to a considerable extent of people with no integrity and without enough education, coming from provincial and poor backgrounds. As for their wealth, it has been won in a gangster-like, corrupt,

mafia and criminal way, using the state power". In this analysis, he refers mainly to the political elite or politicians, whom he calls 'political hyenas' from the fact they use their positions of power to scavenge the country and people's resources in order to rule over Albanians.

The early transition period, therefore, exhibited a discernible limitation in leadership quality, primarily attributable to the substantial presence of former communist elites within the leadership ranks of post-communist Albania. This phenomenon is unsurprising given that a significant proportion of the country's leaders and politicians had previously belonged to the Party of Labor and had lived under the communist system for the majority of their lives. As the Albanian journalist Mustafa Nano (2003) points out, "Albania has been governed by political leaders inexperienced in the procedures of democratic life, known for their incompetence and irresponsibility".

One notable consequence of this historical context was the apparent persistence of a communist mentality within the Albanian political class, manifesting in a dearth of essential political skills such as tolerance, cooperation, compromise and negotiation. As Nordlinger (2005) argues, "Post-Communists aren't so 'post', they still think like communists and act like communists. They have not developed democratic ways of living, dealing and governing".

Civil society was another new actor emerging in the beginning of transition. According to Larry Diamond, the functions of civil society include "limiting state power, promoting a modern type of citizenship and democracy-building, and creating channels for the articulation of interests and opportunities for participation and influence" (quoted in Pridham, 2000:233). Albania did not inherit a 'civil society', because the state and the communist party had absolute control and penetrated every aspect of society and life. Even before that, Albania lacked civic traditions and independent social organizations and associations. These historical and communist legacies have been and still are among the major obstacles to the construction of a powerful civil society in Albania. Another reason has been the fact that during the transition the efforts by government to support its development have been scarce and there has been little dialogue and interaction between civil society and government. The political elite has neither encouraged, nor has been willing to accept the contribution from civil society. Another barrier has been its lack of real autonomy from the state and especially the political parties. NGOs, think-tanks and different associations and organizations have been very dependent on political influence or control. Even though numerous and existing in great variety, NGOs have been unable to speak on behalf of the general public or to bring substantial pressure to bear on government policies. "Most of the Albanian NGOs are not representatives of indigenous social movements - IRI (2003) noted - but rather closed circles of elites that conduct a one-way dialogue and try to

milk international donors, as well as the government". The international donors, in order to bridge the gap between the public and politics, have put a lot of effort into strengthening Albanian civil society, mainly through funding the NGOs. Therefore, the NGO sector has been dependent on foreign funding, which UNDP (2000:71) in one of its report for Albania described as "a dependency relationship that is very disturbing, since there is a tendency on part of civil society organizations to accommodate in their projects the objectives of the donors rather than the priorities and needs of the country". Therefore, as Bogdani and Loughlin (2007:188) point out, "civil society has not become the source of alternative views and approaches to the challenges Albania faces and which could greatly influence the decision-makers. It has not made enough efforts to explore citizens' concerns and needs, let alone to articulate and channel them sufficiently. Therefore, it will take a long time for civil society to develop the culture, values and institutions, necessary to hold government to account in a democratic manner". In the meantime, the political class, or rather, the political parties, will continue to dominate civil society rather than the other way around.

Similarly, the think-tanks, professional organizations, civic and grass-root associations, although numerous, lacked the organizational experience, financial resources and advocacy skills necessary to influence decision-making. Furthermore, many intellectuals with potential knowledge and experience to lead civic movements, associations and organizations, became instead attached to political parties, mostly because politics has become a very 'profitable' profession and also only through politics one can climb the career ladder in Albania.

Trade unions, as another actor, have been weak organizationally and have had limited affiliations, as a result of de-industrialization and high unemployment, which occurred during the first years of transition. Business and professional associations, on the other hand, thrived during the first phase of transition as the result of privatisation reforms and the emergence of the private sector. A new business elite emerged, a part of which has had a powerful role not only in the economic life of the country, but also in political life. A part of this business elite, known as the 'oligarchs', started to increasingly exercise considerable control and power over the media and politics. The informal connections between the business and political elites were what often counted in decision-making processes.

The 'knowledge elite' is probably the most important actor for ensuring progress and the success of the democratization process. Parson (1995:265) argues that "the rise of technical knowledge can lead to a meritocratic system in which the most highly educated will form the main social elite". Knowledge is vital to understanding the modern world and to coping with the challenges of globalization, high technology and competition. Albania is not a society where 'knowledge' is sufficiently appreciated or considered important, but if the country is to succeed on

the road of democratization and European integration on which it has embarked, the ideological or political forms of policy and decision-making will have to gradually be complemented by a more technocratic approach. Unfortunately, during the years of transition Albania has experienced the phenomenon of 'brain drain', which is the emigration of educated people, professionals and intellectuals. This has led to negative consequences for the country, as intelligentsia (intellectuals, academics, talented and educated people) are a key section of the political, knowledge and cultural elites of a country and more importantly a very influential factor in the progress and democratization. Albania lost one-third of its qualified people over the first decade of the transition with many immigrating into countries which have 'points' systems to attract educated and highly-skilled migrants. The paradox is that wealth nations use various schemes to 'absorb the brains', while poor countries like Albania make little effort to stop them from leaving or to attract them back home. Whilst the emigration of the working class is seen more as economically beneficial, the exodus of intellectuals and professionals has almost entirely negative consequences: socially, because the country loses the 'brains' and talents; politically, because it loses the educated middle class, from which can come potential leaders; and economically, because the most educated people integrate quickly into their new homeland and seem less likely to send money back; fiscally, because tax-payers have paid to educate many of those who leave, who in most cases end up working in jobs below the level of their qualifications at home. In 2006 the UNDP office in Tirana undertook a 'Brain Gain' initiative, which was assisting the Government of Albania in the effort of utilizing expatriate Albanian expertise for the country's socio-economic development. Many educated Albanians, with good diplomas and work experience abroad, started to return to Albania with a good will to contribute for their country's development. However, they faced obstacles and disappointments, even for finding a job, never mind being considered as assets. As Bogdani and Loughlin (2007:) argue, "the Albanian leaders seemed not interested in encouraging the brightest to return home, on the contrary, they used all means to de-motivate and discourage them…They are more comfortable governing a country from which the smartest, most educated, civilized and skilled citizens leave every day, rather than implementing strategies and finding ways to make the country a better place to live and to work". Unfortunately, a country like Albania, where advancement and progress depend on political affiliation rather than meritocracy, will continue to lose bright people to societies and countries where talent and 'brain' are appreciated.

Another important actor in the process of democratization is the 'bureaucratic elite' or civil servants. The undermining of the role of civil servants in Albania comes from the lack of a Weberian rational culture (Bogdani & Loughlin, 2004:51). Instead of a bureaucracy of professional and administrative values,

Albania has developed a politicized bureaucracy, where the attitudes of civil servants are shaped by political affiliation or the preferences of their ministers, as described by Hall (1993:275), "where they stand depends on where they sit". The continuous shortcomings in the Albanian public administration, most notably the high degree of politicization, lack of professionalism and meritocracy, as well as high levels of corruption, have led to a poor quality of civil servants, especially those in key positions. Most of them have constantly been political militants, not having the necessary professional expertise and knowledge, or the administrative and managerial skills. After every rotation of power and a new party coming to government, most of civil servants are fired, making their appointments generally short-term, which harms the institutional memory. Moreover, ministers and high officials put their energies more into influencing (and subsequently profiting from) tenders and improper public procurements, rather than into strategic reform or developing a strong public administration and a professional, depoliticized and meritocratic civil service. This results in ineffectiveness, lack of productivity and failure to carry out reforms. As Miranda Vickers (2003) notes, "the government is composed mostly of mediocre officials and their patronage networks threaten to keep many reforms at a superficial level".

A key pillar of any democratic society is an open and free press. The media plays a prominent role in the democratic process, because, as Hall (1993:288) argues, "the press is both a mirror of public opinion and a magnifying glass of the issues that it takes up". Media and journalists have been an actor with a growing significant influence. From being just propagandists during communism, the journalists changed their role into being social advocates and critics. Media has had a very powerful and influential role, making important, outspoken and courageous contributions to raising the awareness of Albanians to democratic values and processes, by criticizing the wrongdoings of governments and politicians and by revealing domestic political and social problems, as well as possible solutions. Many written and electronic media (newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations) started to emerge and to grow in number in the first years of transition. In recent years, the proliferation and increasing popularity of social media platforms have led to the emergence of numerous online portals. These platforms exhibit a heightened degree of independence from political affiliations, consequently enabling a more transparent and efficient exposure of governmental and political wrongdoings. However, over the years, some media in particular started to be dependent on the various power centers (government, political parties, and economic interests), as instruments to serve their interests, and to have close ties with the political elites and business and thus have ceded part of their independence in exchange for financial gains (Council of Europe, 2004). In order to play a better role in the democratization process, journalists need to become more professional, ethical,

and independent (politically and financially) to provide balanced, responsible and objective reporting.

In this context, a pluralist society with a wide range of domestic actors has been developing during the transition. However, they have not been able to influence the policy and decision-making processes, which is one of the indicators of a well-functioning democratic society.

Among all the domestic actors, the most powerful and influential throughout the three decades of the democratic transition, has been the political class of the country. The process of democratic reforms and the prospect of EU membership in Albania have relied, to a great extent, on the political class. However, instead of being a reliable and responsible factor in the process of democratization and EU accession, the Albanian political elite, as the International Crisis Group (2003:15) points out, "has shown a chronic lack of responsibility, willingness, professionalism and commitment to tackle the country's major problems. Its primary objective has been its own self-interest and self-preservation".

Another crucial actor – the international community

The inability of local actors, especially of political class, to deal with domestic challenges and cooperate with one another, the crisis of the electoral processes and other unsolved political and economic problems, has 'promoted' another actor, the international community.

Since 1991, when Albania opened up to the world, this new actor has been crucial in Albania's transition. The lack of legitimacy and the unreliability of political parties and other domestic actors, governments and state institutions, have increasingly amplified the importance of this dimension. As Bogdani and Loughlin (2007:225) argue, "the international community in Albania has been trying to fulfill the role of broker, facilitator and mediator that the state institutions have proved unable to perform". International organizations, such as OSCE and ODHIR (in elections and electoral campaigns), CoE, UNDP, World Bank and FMN (in economic affairs), as well as certain foreign embassies, most notably the US Embassy, have been important players on the Albanian political scene. Also, some international institutes such as the 'US International Republican Institute' (IRI), and the 'US National Democratic Institute' (NDI), have contributed greatly for fostering political dialogue and mediating the discussions among political parties.

Especially after the 1997 crises, Albanian politics have grown even more dependent on international mediation and arbitration. Its judgement has been brought to bear on very important domestic issues (even to the elections of the Presidents of the Republic), as the local actors have seemed increasingly incapable

of finding common ground. Albanian politicians have become increasingly prone to rely on international interventions, and they devote more time and effort to winning the sympathy of international actors, rather than get together and negotiate with one another. As Kajsiu, Bumci and Rakipi (2002:7) argue, "there was created a vicious circle of dependency culture, both economic and political, in which the local actors have become increasingly dependent on the international community and thus the latter has become increasingly involved in Albanian domestic politics".

This has led to the loss of confidence and patience of Albanian people with their political class, and a growing majority seeing their hope as coming from outside, even thinking their country should be governed and monitored as an international protectorate of the UN, the US, or the EU. There is a widespread perception by the general public that most of the important decisions about Albanian politics (even the 'decision' which political party will win the elections) are taken with the 'blessing' of the international community. The omnipresence of foreign diplomats in government and political activities is one of the factors that has fueled such perceptions. The pattern of patronage in Albania remains prominent, as it has always been a distinguishable feature of Balkan politics in general.

This is also reflected in public opinion surveys, which show that Albanian citizens trust more the international than national institutions. A public opinion poll conducted in 2006 (organized by *Mjaft* Movement and carried out by Index Albania Company)[1] showed that Albanians believed more in international organizations: they trust NATO (67 percent), EU (65 percent) and OSCE (62 percent). Among national institutions the most credible ones were the media (56 percent) and the President of the Republic (53 percent). The least credible institutions were the government (41 percent), the prosecution service (35 percent) and the judiciary (32 percent).

Institute for Democracy and Mediation has conducted opinion polls on the perceptions and attitudes of Albanian citizens on matters such as transparency and accountability of public institutions, prevalence of corruption, level of citizen engagement in policy and decision-making, satisfaction with public-service delivery etc. The reports based on these surveys, named "Trust in Governance", have been published annually since 2013.

The findings of 2021 poll,[2] showed that international organizations such as NATO (73 percent), the UN (71 percent), and the EU (71 percent) maintained their ranking as the most trusted institutions in Albania. Albanian citizens perceived religious institutions (67 percent) as the most trusted domestic institutions, followed by educational institutions (57 percent), the armed forces (54 percent),

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[1] Mjaft, (2006) "The Public Opinion Poll over the first 100 days of the Government", commissioned by the *MJAFT!* Movement and carried out by Index Albania Company. January.

[2] Institute for Democracy and Mediation, (2022) "Trust in Governance 2021", Report of the Annual Public Opinion Poll in Albania, 9th Edition. September 19, 2022.

and civil-society organizations (52 percent). The president (23 percent), political parties (26 percent), the courts (27 percent), and the prosecution (28 percent) were among the least trusted institutions.

The most recent poll of 2022[3] showed again that international organizations, such as NATO (74 percent), the UN (71 percent) and the EU (70 percent), continued to be the most trusted institutions in Albania. Religious institutions (64 percent) continued to be the most trusted domestic institutions, followed by the armed forces (59 percent), educational institutions (54 percent) and civil society organizations (53 percent). Political parties (29 percent), parliament (33 percent), prosecution (35 percent) and the courts (36 percent) ranked as the least trusted ones. Half (50 percent) of Albanians trusted the Special Prosecution Office against Organized Crime and Corruption (SPAK), which was added for the first time to the list of surveyed institutions in 2022. This percentage is higher compared to the trust levels reported for the prosecution and courts.

As we can see from the findings of these polls and other empirical data, there is no doubt that legitimacy in Albania lies with the international community and its verdict tends to be considered as final.

The role of the EU and USA

In this chapter the analysis will focus on the role of the two most significant external actors throughout the Albanian transition.

The influence of the European Union

In the last 23 years the European Union has been the most influential and important actor, because of the prospective membership of Albania in the EU, including important processes such as the "candidate status", visa liberalization, the opening of negotiations etc.

The EU has been the dominant external actor, for two main reasons: firstly, the attraction to the EU model, which represents an affluent, prosperous and democratic union of countries; secondly, the conditionality - EU leverage, exercised through financial aid and sanctions of "carrot and stick" approach.

European integration has become a driving force with an influential impact on Albania and a source of domestic change and transformation. The prospect of EU membership and the whole process of integration and Europeanisation has proved to be very useful for Albania. Europeanisation is the adoption of domestic policies, institutions and rules conform to those of the EU. It has been a complementary

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[3] Institute for Democracy and Mediation, (2023) "Trust in Governance 2022", Report of the Annual Public Opinion Poll in Albania, 10th Edition. July 18, 2023.

process with democratization, which is the whole process of transformation from totalitarian rule towards a liberal democracy. Hence, both these two processes aim to achieve their respective goals, by applying the same means - the democratic reforms.

Most of Albania's population and national elites have been in favor of joining this powerful club of democratic values and economic benefits, which furthermore is helping the country in its efforts of democratization. For this reason, the EU, through its Delegation Office in Tirana, has been amongst the most trusted international organization by the Albanian people, as mentioned above. According to the last report of the European Parliament, a poll in 2022 found that as many as 97 percent of Albanians were in favor of EU accession.[4] Similarly, asked by Barometer of Euronews Albania, 95.9% of Albanians support the country's membership in the EU,[5] remaining the most pro-European country in the region and perhaps in all Europe.

The political class of the country, on the other hand, despite being in favor of EU membership, has used it more as rhetoric than a true aspiration, as Bogdani and Loughlin (2004:92) argue. Taking into consideration the high levels of corruption and the connection of politics with organized crime, it could be assumed that this is a goal that Albanian politicians are not interested in achieving, for the simple reason that democracy and EU membership would mean the end of using the country's and people's resources for personal benefits, and no more dirty money in their pockets.

Therefore, the EU remains the primary locus of Albania's efforts in managing the difficult period of transition and its goal for the future. The EU seems to be the best guarantee of democratization and progress in Albania. This is because, firstly, the prospect of EU membership is a credible prospect in its political horizon, a strong incentive and a powerful driving force for carrying out domestic reforms. The Copenhagen criteria, which provide fundamental principles relating to democratic governance and the rule of law, as well as setting the objective technical standards for the development of a market economy, serve as motivating factors for the domestic actors to undertake changes and push the reforms ahead.

Secondly, the EU is committed to helping Albania and to bringing her closer to the Community, reflected in the concrete process of SAP, initially with the SAA and now with the opening of membership negotiations.

Thirdly, the EU is the largest provider of multilateral assistance to Albania, which operates under democratic conditionality. This financial and technical support has covered a big number of sectors, including humanitarian aid, trade, macro-financial assistance, political stability, public order, public administration

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[4] European Parliament, (2023) "Report on Albania 2022", July.
[5] EuroNews. Albania, (2022) "Do Albanians still want to join the EU?". December 23.

reform, judiciary and law enforcement, infrastructure, agriculture, health and education, and fighting organized crime, fraud and corruption. Following the coronavirus outbreak in 2020, the Commission provided the region – on top of existing assistance – with over €3.3 billion worth of EU financial support, mobilized jointly with the European Investment Bank (European Parliament, 2022). Albania also received €180 million in the form of macro-financial assistance. Therefore, as European Parliament (2023) notes in its most recent Report on Albania, the EU remains the main donor of financial assistance to Albania, mainly through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III).

Because of this tremendous role, the EU is the only element of consensus that unites all political parties and all social groups in Albania.

The role of the United States

Unlike the EU (and its Delegation Office in Albania) that has become an important player post-2000, the USA through its Embassy in Tirana has been as such throughout the whole transition, ever since the diplomatic relations were established between two countries right after the collapse of communism. American diplomats and ambassadors have been always very proactive in Albanian politics, acting as 'sentinels' of the newly fragile democracy. This is seen in many cases, in particular with regard to the most problematic issues such as corruption and organized crime.

The profound engagement of US Ambassadors in the domestic political landscape of Albania has been quite influential, extending beyond simply advising on democratization matters. This active involvement, frequently transcending the advisory roles, has subsequently cultivated a prevailing perception among Albanians that US Ambassadors behave like de facto 'presidents' of the country. This sentiment is linked with the decision-making authority vested in them, thereby positioning them as pivotal arbiters in matters pertaining to Albanian domestic politics. During the first decade of transition such palpable influence was notably evident in two critical junctures: the 1996 shambling elections when the US was the most outspoken critic, asking for their repeat from the DP government, and a year later when the pyramid schemes collapsed, bringing the country on the brink of a civil war.

The involvement and contribution of the international community and in particular of the US was also seen in the resolution of pre-election crisis before the parliamentary elections of 2017. In February 2017 the Albanian opposition parties led by Democratic party started a series of anti-government protests, largely in Tirana, that centered around government corruption, the illicit drug situation in Albania, fear of electoral fraud in the parliamentary elections, and

alleged manipulation of the voting process by the socialist government (Deutsche Welle, 2017). Protesters subsequently erected a tent, *The Tent of Freedom*, in which the opposition held daily meetings with supporters (Reuters, 2017). As the situation was escalating without finding a common ground among the political parties, in April two representatives from the European Parliament, MEP's Knut Fleckenstein and David McAllister came to Tirana to mediate a solution to the ongoing deadlock, but with no results (EWB, 2017). The solution came after the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs of the US State Department, Hoyt Brian Yee, visited Albania, setting a deadline for the leaders to find a solution to the political crisis. On 18th of May, Prime Minister Rama and Leader of Opposition Basha, met and discussed the offered solution package from David McAllister, which was called *McAllister+*. After more than 5 hours of negotiations, both parties signed an agreement, postponing the elections and setting a new date, as well as approved changes in the government cabinet, with several ministers and one Vice-Prime Minister from the opposition.

In the last decade one of the most outstanding involvements of the US Embassy has been in the Justice Reform. The judicial system in Albania has been constantly criticized from the international community for being chronically plagued by three problems: corruption, unprofessionalism and lack of independence (from politics and organized crime), therefore its reform was imperative. However, the genuine call for the reform was not led by Albanian political party leaders, but by international community, most notably the US Embassy through its then Ambassador Donald Lu. Many Albanians have seen Lu's commitment to the reform as a guarantee that it would be implemented; some have even described him as the potential savior of Albania at a time when corruption was rampant and impunity has been institutionalized. Indeed Mr. Lu has been the most outspoken person for the judicial reform. In an interview to BIRN, Lu described it as "the most important reform in the 25 years since the fall of communism…which has the possibility of ridding the Albanian judicial system of corrupt judges and prosecutors who steal the money of ordinary citizens and allow organized crime figures, murderers and corrupt politicians to buy justice" (Balkan Insight, 2016).

The justice reform process launched in July 2015 with a set of amendments that changed one third of the Albania's Constitution. The reform aimed to tackle existing shortcomings in the sector, including weaknesses linked to independence and accountability of judges and prosecutors and lack of efficiency and professionalism, as pointed out by the Progress Report of European Commission (2016:57). It is being implemented ever since and its main features have included measures to fight corruption, by establishing a new Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Structure (SPAK). Another measure to fight corruption and also establish public trust in the judiciary, has been the launch of a generalized re-

evaluation of all currently serving judges, prosecutors and legal advisers, called the 'Vetting'. It started in 2017, with the establishment of the first instance vetting body, the 'Independent Qualification Commission' (IQC), as well as the International Monitoring Operation (IMO), which is supervising the Vetting process and exercising independent oversight.

The other step in the judicial reform has been the "Law on Decriminalization" (approved by the Albania's parliament in December 2015), consisting of barring people with criminal records from holding public office or most civil service jobs - the so-called "law-breakers turned into law-makers".

In addition to the reform of judiciary, the US Embassy has played a very active role in helping Albania with its two persistent problems, corruption and organized crime. The inefficiency of Albanian government has constantly been highlighted with concern by the US Ambassadors. Mrs. Donald Lu in an interview stated "The biggest and most difficult challenge remains ahead of Albania – the fight against organized crime. Until the big fish are arrested, prosecuted and go to jail, the cannabis will return, judges will be bribed, and government officials will be corrupted" (U.S. Embassy Tirana, 2017). Frustrated with Albania's leadership to combat corruption, the US has shifted its policies from backing strong leaders to strong laws, a welcome change many Albanians and internationals have been waiting for some time (The Huffington Post, 2015).

However, the opposition Democratic Party has repeatedly said that EU and US ambassadors (in particular the last one, Mrs. Jury Kim), have favored the ruling Socialist Party, turning a blind eye on the wrongdoings of the government and the fact that Albania in the last years has become a narco-state. The opposition has accused the Socialists and their PM Edi Rama for turning Albania into a 'Columbia of Europe' (Sunday Times, 2018).

Conclusion

Albanian road towards democratization could have had a different trajectory without the presence of the international community pushing for and directing reforms. If it were not for its role and some important players, most notably the EU and the US, Albania would continue to be a 'Balkan Banana Republic', left in the hands of irresponsible, incapable and egocentric politicians and governments, where corruption and organized crime would flourish, with the mafia, criminals and politicians, the country's '*nouveaux riches*,' enjoying privileges, wealthy and luxurious lifestyles on the one hand, and the majority of the population living in poverty on the other.

The international community and international organizations have shown real determination to get Albania on the right track of democratic reforms and integration. These positive driving forces from outside (which give both a purpose and a direction) have been essential for the country to progress on the road to democratization. Their policies and influence have been helping Albania to get on, get in, and catch up with the rest of Europe.

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The EU and Turkey in a Twisted Marriage: Challenges of the European Union further Enlargement

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Abstract

This paper is an effort to investigate the principal challenges associated with further enlargement of the European Union. The specific focus of the analysis is the case of Turkey as a real dilemma for the EU. The eastward expansion of the European Union poses multi-dimensional concerns. These concerns relate to political, economic, cultural and geostrategic delicate questions that are perceived as crucial issues for the Union. However, it should be pointed that this is a game that cannot be played unilaterally by a single actor such as the EU. It also depends on how Turkey will play the game of integration which –however- is principally led by the Union. Considering this, the paper is organised in four main sections. The first section introduces -political challenges from the EU enlargement towards Turkey, the second section introduces -economic challenges and it is followed by the two last sections with -geostrategic and -identity issues ending with some -brief conclusions.

Keywords: European Union; Turkey; Enlargement; Political Challenges; Economic Challenges; Geostrategic Challenges; Identity\Cultural Challenges.

Introduction

Many times, Turkey-EU negotiations have been overshadowed for different reasons. The EU has been quite reluctant and still seems so. In the effort to shed light towards the challenges associated with further enlargement of the European Union towards Turkey, this paper is organised in four main sections. The first section introduces political challenges from the EU enlargement, the second section introduces economic challenges, followed by the two last sections with geostrategic and identity issues.

Political Challenges

In political terms, the shape of the Union is very important and the EU finds itself in the perpetuated crossroads of widening or deepening. It might sound superficial that the decision for a wider Union undermines the possibility of a deeper integration among the old member states but anyways it is clear that further widening will significantly influence it. It means that the federalist dream is/will be seriously challenged by increasing the diversity of political interests and views within the Union which might be much harder to contain a single framework.

A very important political issue is the decision-making impact of Turkey into the EU-27 and the European Union capacity to act according the new power distribution among the member states. The redistribution and a new balance of power are decisive for the Turkish EU acceptability.

Of course, enlargement itself would change the EU decision-making process but the case of Turkey represents a delicate instance because of its particularities that will be further discussed. Turkish membership is calculated to have a large impact on the real-power distribution/allocation among member states of the EU. This impact can be technically evaluated but also normatively evaluated because (partially) it is on the basis of this evaluation that Turkey's European integration depends.

The decision-making in EU is a complex process between institutions but the most relevant dynamic that needs to be taken in consideration is the decision-making procedure in the European Council and the procedure in the Council of Ministers. This shows clearly how Turkey will truly change actual balances.

The European Council as a body which "provides the Union with the necessary impetus for its development" takes (nearly all of) its decisions by unanimity or

consensus. Actually the Treaty of Lisbon, Article 15(4) of the amended Treaty on European Union (TEU) presents statically the main rule for decision-making. Article 15(4) (Lisbon Treaty): 4. Except where the Treaties provide otherwise, decisions of the European Council shall be taken by consensus. In terms of its potential decision-making capacity, it is evident that this institution is fairly affected by enlargement. This is because the larger and more diverse the membership of the European Council becomes the more difficult it is likely to be to find consensus (Stephanou, 2006, p. 96). Individual members of the Council and many other members of EU organs tend to vote in the national interest of their home countries. The representation of Turkey interests according this rationale might sharpen the division. This dynamic derives by the strong nationalistic orientation of Turkey which might have also deeper implications.

Further enlargement of the EU towards Turkey would bring a redistribution of power in the Council of Ministers also. Lisbon Treaty confirmed that the EU is based on democratic principles. New decision-making rules were presented as solutions for solving the problems of legitimacy, democratic representation and transparency bringing answers for the democratic deficit.

Decision-making in the Council of Ministers taking place under Lisbon Treaty voting rules happens according the double majority (qualified majority) voting system. The bigger the country's population, the more votes it has, but the numbers are weighted in support of the less populous countries. However, in cases when the Council votes on the basis of a simple qualified majority, the number of votes for each Member State is predetermined by the Treaty itself (from nearly 29 votes each for the four largest Member States to 3 votes for the smallest). The system of simple qualified majority voting continued until November 2014. From 2014 the case is to be different: -it is a double majority -so that, in order to be adopted, an act must have the support of at least 55 % of the EU Member States and at least 65 % of the population of the EU (Facts from Lisbon Treaty and from previous Treaties). This does not change the principle behind the argument that -Turkey will reallocate power because of the population. Theoretically, considering regulations and arguments of the Nice Treaty voting rules, providing Qualified Majority Voting in the Council of Ministers -Turkey would be possibly the second-most powerful member state in the EU. Under the -old Nice- rules, to be considered and elaborated as a conjunctional argument, the power differences among the member states with populations of more than 50 million would be small (Baldwin and Widgrén, 2005, p. 1). In fact, Turkey's population nowadays is more than 80 million. Coherently, with further enlargement, it is a fact that the balance of power between the countries will significantly change. Because of Turkey integration, the EU will face not only a change of numbers but also a de facto re-distribution of the control, influence and authority, which will

have a great impact in decision-making. This redistribution and reallocation of power in the European Union is a very important factor that might -decrease the acceptability of Turkey.

Long and difficult negotiations at the 2000 Nice summit were dedicated to the working out of how many votes each country should have to avoid the situation where a group of small countries could work against the big countries and vote them down, even though the small countries together represent fewer people than the big ones. Difficulties were also presented in the case of Lisbon Treaty where the double majority (qualified majority) voting formula was worked out. Taking in consideration the population of Turkey it is obvious that this country will have a strong voice in EU decision-making process because the rules related to the demographic factor. On the other side if Turkey would play "strategic games" it would not be very difficult to create different "wining alliances" moving the actual allocation of EU power. Because of the demographic factor, different schemes related to numbers and "formulas" can be created and thus the results might be completely different from now. This might turn to be a very delicate issue.

Furthermore, the Council of Minsters recognises the unanimity procedure in order to take its decisions but as various institutional reforms have taken effect, QMV has largely replaced unanimous voting. Qualified majority voting now extends to policy areas that required unanimity according to the Nice Treaty. However, according to the unanimity system everyone has to be in agreement. It is less effective for developing Community policies because of the veto risk. It makes QMV a most common method of decision-making, used especially in most sensitive issues. It might be deduced that Turkey will have a serious impact in the decision making process under QMV in the Council but anyways it can not be denied that under unanimity there will be also likewise problems. To understand this dynamic, we must evaluate and take in consideration that there are interrelated background factors which divide Turkey and EU thus creating a gap from which the decision-making process will suffer. Under the background factors "*marque*" are included issues that give Turkey a different tune-impetus from EU.

Included in the range of political challenges, despite decision-making procedures in the European Council and the Council of Ministers, the Commission might experience difficulties in its work. The increasing number of actors will complicate the process of agenda setting and at the same time an increased number of nationalities in the Commission administration and services will create further efficiency difficulties.

Another legal and political argument which needs to be emphasised is that enlargement increases the administrative heterogeneity in the EU to such an

extent that it is likely to challenge the notion of homogeneous implementation and application of rules and regulations (Sverdrup, 2005, p. 2). This argument is valid for the EU enlargement towards Turkey especially taking in consideration the fragile democracy and doubtful institutional balances in the country.

Economic Challenges

On the economic point of view, one of the most important challenges of the enlargement towards Turkey is to secure a financial framework for this "sensitive" enlargement process. The financial framework should provide means for growth and prosperity for Turkey as a member of EU, but at the same time it should not "drain" the other member states and the European economy. It is a difficult case itself and what might make it more difficult is the economic crisis and its long term effects in the Union. Economic objections to Turkish membership are based mostly on the relative underdevelopment of Turkey's economy compared to the economies of EU members and Turkey's high rate of population growth.

Economic effects of Turkey accession to the EU should be evaluated taking in consideration its size, per capita income and dependence on agriculture (Flam, 2005, p. 341). This factors show that Turkey might become the largest recipient of transfers from the EU budget.

The economic and social role of agriculture in Turkey is very important. Considering the size of Turkish agriculture and the impact that it will have on the Union budget, it is clear that agriculture will be one of the most important issues in terms of absorption capacity. It is also clear that Turkey would be eligible for significant support under the Common Agricultural Policy including the rural development policy. This would require a deep recalculating of EU founds and changing of actual balances in "who takes what".

Turkey's low level of GDP per capita, the wide regional disparities and economic imbalances that have kept the country locked in a high inflation spiral, would require significant support from the Structural and Cohesion Funds over a long period of time. It is a real challenge for the Union in terms of the cohesion policy because of the need to reallocate a considerable percent of founds. "On the basis of the current data and eligibility criteria, the entire territory of Turkey would be eligible for assistance under Structural Funds as well as for assistance under the Cohesion Fund" (Andoura, 2006, p. 4).

Turkey would lower the EU average GDP level and a big problem for the EU acceptability of Turkey would be the fact that a number of regions of EU-27 actually benefiting from Structural Funds support would lose their eligibility and sustainability upon Turkey's accession.

Another issue that is perceived as a potential serious problem is the fact that Turkey's already large population is expected to have a bigger growing rate in the coming years. Amongst others, the result would be having too many Turkish workers for too few jobs in the Union because of free labour movement among member states. This would create economic troubles and of course social problems of integrating those workers into EU.

Geostrategic Challenges

There are a number of obstacles for the enlargement of the EU towards Turkey in terms of foreign policy and in a geostrategic perspective. Enlargement towards Turkey would bring the EU borders near instable neighbours. EU borders with the Middle East, the Black Sea and Caucasus will raise a lot of sensitive issues. This location will shift the Union's boarders to the South East and increase the Union's range of fears and problems related to these regions.

Potential obstacles in changing EU borders derive from the fact that it would be very difficult to manage and control such extensive land borders and cost lines meanwhile Turkey is perceived as quite hesitant to align itself to EU positions on issues which considers that interfere with its security interests. The EU doubts and relative lack of interest in Turkey can be explained in part also by the fact that the Union is not willing to take an active and direct global role in areas of conflict, such as the Middle East. If this would be the case, an active global role would require large investments in many directions but actually the costs would be bigger than the benefits. This would put the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy in a different light which actually is a big challenge. So the question is: Is the EU ready to be involved in those issues? As a matter of a fact, except in the areas within its immediate neighbourhood, the EU has proved its will to delegate responsibilities to the United States, thereby withdrawing from Unity involvement. These are obstacle elements that reduce Turkey acceptability for the European Union. Another issue closely related with the previous discussion is the question of immigration of third-country nationals to the EU through Turkey. Turkey's eastern borders are porous and quite difficult to protect. Problematic areas would use Turkey as a transit country to the EU. This challenge is further complicated by the fact that public opinion in the EU has in general been lukewarm towards enlargement precisely because they fear massive immigration and a weakening of border controls (Apap, Carrera and Kirisici, 2004, p. 1)

Moreover, two specific issues continue to complicate the larger picture: Turkey's disturbed relationship with its European neighbour Greece and domestic security policy given priority over external diplomacy, even if the latter suffers as a result.

This can be seen as the intrusion of domestic security issues into the international scene.

The antagonism between Greece and Turkey has a long history, and the identification of each other as the national threat is still fixed on each national perceptions. The most serious issue between the two countries is their dispute over the island of Cyprus, which dates back to 1974. The triangle of still unsettled problems between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus would have large implications in almost all EU internal and external (coherent) policies and also on decision-making mechanisms.

Turkish foreign policy has been formulated within a spectrum of political realism, with more than potential use of military power, threat of war and coercion. Actually this is the very basic element that distinguishes Turkey from other EU member states. It is a tendency that contributes to set Turkey outside acceptable limits by the EU mode of international behaviour.

Any challenge to the 'indivisible unity of the Turkish state" is still likely to see domestic security policy given priority over external diplomacy. So the Kurdish threat of armed protests or any kind of rebellion is a reason that might set Turkey out of -a "normal" behaviour.

During July 2003 antiterrorism legislation was amended by the parliament to drop a clause covering "propaganda against the indivisible unity of the state" as a terrorist offence. However, "propaganda encouraging the use of terrorist methods still carries potential sentences up to five years, insults to state and threats to its unity could carry a six months' sentence (Lake, 2005, p. 94).

What is very sensitive is that armed forces persist in attachment to the Prime Minister Office rather than to the ministry of defence (Lake, 2005, p. 96) and many people are used of thinking of Turkey as a semi-military regime. The problem stems from the fact that the EU is not and can not operate as a conflict resolution mechanism. It would be costly for all the EU mechanisms to get involved to resolve this kind of problems and offer "paternal" support. To Europeans these elements constitute an adverse input for the integration equation because all this is perceived as a further challenge to afford not only in terms of the external policy but as issues with deeper implications.

Identity\Cultural Challenges

Another set of arguments that put a range of new challenges in front of the EU, derive from the identity issues. EU enlargement policy can not be treated only as a form of foreign policy tool but it should be seen more widely.

Both discursively constructs and essential approaches towards identity, lead to the creation of the 'insiders' and the 'outsiders' of Europe through varying dynamics between them. Any kind of identity is reinforced by the existence of contrasting identities that provide a defining point of reference. Scholars suggest that a European identity is reinforced by the existence of two powerful "others" or "outsiders". -One in the west and one in the east. So on one side we have the United States that provides a powerful "other" for the European political identity in order to be defined, and on the other side we have an Islamic culture and the identification of Turkey as basically a Middle Eastern Muslim society.

However, you define it, real or perceived political and cultural differences between Turkey and European Union have led to the same result. They undermine Turkey's EU application and strongly perpetuate its image as a European outsider. So, the doubts related to the integration derive from the position that Turkey is outside Europe and trying to get in.

According to a large number of sceptics Turkey does not meet the "nowhere defined standards" of what it means to be European. It is very difficult to agree upon such a delicate issue. Turkish political leaders accuse Europe of trying to form a "Christian club," from which Muslim countries would be excluded.

"The media, especially in France and Germany, writes of a "clash of civilizations" between Turkey and Europe. Pope Benedict XVI once said (Bencivenga 2005): "The roots that have formed Europe are those of Christianity . . . Turkey is founded on Islam . . . Thus the entry of Turkey into the EU would be anti-historical" (J. Dixon, 2008, p. 638). European officials put it very bluntly: 'Turkey is . . . too poor . . . too Muslim, too harsh, too culturally different, too everything' (Huntington, 2002, p. 146).

The decision of Turkey's integration puts at stake also competing visions of what the European Union will be in the future and how Turkey might or might not match with those expectations. Would the Turkish accession create risks for the European "civilizational project" if there is one, and further more would this accession reduce Europe to a simple customs union? Those are dilemmas that strongly raise wider doubts on the enlargement as the "key" of the Union future. In fact, the more Turkey fulfils Copenhagen political and economic criteria and demonstrates will to be closer to Europe, the more uncertain the ending becomes. In a certain way it is also because the cultural differences between Turkey and the EU are perceived essentially. According to this vision the cultural distinctions among people are highly important and permanently enrooted. This issue might result as the Achilles' heel for the enlargement.

Conclusions

EU enlargement is a sensitive question but the case of Turkey puts it in a real crossway. Turkey's accession constitutes a set of challenges in four main inter-related dimensions. The set of problems that accompany enlargement towards Turkey are political, economic, geostrategic and identity related.

Politically, the decision-making impact of Turkey into the EU-27 and the European Union capacity to act according the new power distribution/allocation among the member states is decisive for the enlargement and the Turkish EU acceptability.

Economic effects of Turkey accession to the EU should be evaluated taking in consideration its size, per capita income and dependence on agriculture (Flam, 2005, p. 341). This factors show that Turkey might become the largest recipient of transfers from the EU budget. So the implications are not only deriving from a new political power balance but are also accompanied by a budget redistribution which is a strong factor that reduces further Turkey acceptability.

The geostrategic challenges at the same time are very important. They mainly include changing of EU borders towards a grey zone of "non-Europe" and the triangle of delicate relations between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus from which EU internal and external policies might suffer.

Finally, the identity issues are equally important and they are related to a number of diversities focusing (grossly) on the religion. This gives a strong incentive to the dilemma of "European Culture or Europe of Cultures" that hardly can find an answer.

All the above discussed questions are important points of debate on the EU enlargement. In the case of Turkey, the decision is very sensitive for the Unity future. The challenges are real but however the enlargement is not impossible if the game of integration is evaluated as a non-zero-sum game by actors in play.

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An ethical perspective on the relationship between Media Communication – Education: Case study

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Abstract

Purpose: *Since advertising to children and adolescents has become ubiquitous, scholars who study the significance and influence of adverts on children raise questions about the communication approach towards this category of the audience.*

This study focuses on two national TV stations which have the highest number of viewers and consequently the highest number of advertisements and time dedicated to it. Some of the adverts repeatedly broadcast on these television channels do not

comply with the ethical standards of MES or the legal framework for Audiovisual Media in the Republic of Albania.

*   **Design/Methodology/Approach:** The method used in this case study is the observational method - the monitoring of the national TV media stations during particular time slots.*

*   **Findings:** The findings and recommendations will be relevant to all the stakeholders.*

*   **Originality/value:** Advertisements in time slots, in which children are actively watching television, are not in accordance with the ethics that are trumpeted by the law on pre-university education and the law on audio-visual broadcasts. We can identify the violation of some articles of the law on which the Audiovisual Media Authority operates.*

*   **Keywords:** TV adverts, communication, education, children, legal framework.*

Introduction

Communication and education are two disciplines that are strongly intertwined. The guiding principles of education are universal values such as fairness, impartiality, non-discrimination, equal treatment, dignity, etc. that ensure the path on which education should progress. The "Basic Competence" in education is the competence that all individuals need for fulfilment and personal development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment.

The first key competence of the learning process is the competence of communication and free speech. For children and young people to develop their personalities, learn and participate actively in society, it is important that they understand the messages addressed to them and express them appropriately through language, symbols, signs, codes and artistic forms.

To become effective communicators, students get all the needed support to use the tools and opportunities of communication and express their thoughts independently, critically and creatively. (Pre-University Education Law, 2018)

Thoughts and ideas are transmitted through communication. Education, on the other hand, is the process of learning according to a framework of ethical rules and certain competencies. Often, we, as members of the audience, get a lot of different messages from mediums that aim to inform. This includes the mass media as a medium that plays the main role in informing the public of every age.

In this study, we will focus on the advertisements in the audio-visual media that have a national license, and that advertise different products of different companies during the advertising spaces.

Literature review

There has always been a controversy regarding the adverts broadcast on television related to content and form. The relationship among media communication and education is a dynamic and influential space where ethical considerations play a pivotal role in shaping the learning environment for students.

A wide range of channels, including digital media and internet resources in addition to traditional textbooks, are included in media communication in education. Its influence on instructional strategies, student engagement, and the entire educational experience goes beyond simple information delivery. It is imperative to acknowledge the ethical ramifications of these factors in order to preserve a responsible and equitable learning environment.

While creating content, media professionals ought to prioritise the truth, transparency, and impartial depiction of information first. The development of digital media has made protecting student privacy and utilising technology ethically of utmost importance. Media workers ought to follow moral guidelines that guarantee the ethical manufacturing and distribution of adverts they produce and broadcast on their channels.

Sometimes the adverts tend to be as persuasive and attractive as they can without taking into consideration the age of the audience.

In addition, the marketing of unhealthy products, such as unhealthy food, alcohol, and tobacco, has been connected to a variety of negative consequences for young people. Food marketing boosts children's immediate and future consumption, product placements and advergames influence food brand choices, and commercial television viewing is linked to childhood obesity. (Jordan, A. B., & Romer, D., 2014).

Youth exposure to alcohol advertising has also been associated with negative outcomes or poor health. Alcohol advertisement increases the risk of teenagers starting to use alcohol and increases the amount of alcohol consumed by adolescents who presently do consume it. (Anderson, P., De Bruijn, A., Angus, K., Gordon, R., & Hastings, G., 2009).

For many years, children have been identified as a vulnerable consumer group by studies for decades due to their developmental capacities. Many studies have found that children do not have the ability to discern persuasive intent in advertisements until they are >7 years old, based on Piaget's theory of cognitive development. (John, D. R., 1999).

Ethics in Communication and Media

The relationship between ethics in communication and advertising involves grabbing attention, swaying customer behaviour, and upholding a commitment to honesty, transparency, and respect. The trust between brands and their audience is crucial to maintaining in a world where commercials are constantly competing for consumers' attention. This is why ethical considerations are crucial.

Ethical communication is a type of communication based on certain values, such as truth, a concise message, and the responsibility that comes from one's word and the actions that follow it. Thus, ethical communication defines a framework or a set of acceptable messages that conform to the code of inclusive language and code of ethics.

This important element of the media landscape is essential for forming narratives, swaying behavior, and influencing public opinion.

Another essential ethical factor in advertising is respect for people's dignity. In addition to being unethical, using derogatory language, stereotypes, or imagery that objectifies people runs the danger of offending a wide range of sophisticated viewers. Advertisers should avoid using language that supports harmful stereotypes or discriminatory attitudes, as this may have an adverse effect on societal values and norms.

Advertisers must present information in a clear and understandable manner, avoiding manipulative techniques that exploit vulnerabilities or capitalize on misinformation.

A guiding concept that goes beyond the good or service being advertised is social responsibility. Advertisers have the ability to mould cultural narratives and impact societal attitudes. Aiming to avoid information that promotes unhealthy behaviours, unrealistic body images, or damaging standards, ethical advertisers take the larger effect of their messaging into account.

Any attempt to mislead or present confusing information is not ethical communication. In addition, the principle of "honesty" in ethical communication is inevitably connected with other fundamental principles – ethics and responsibility. Educators and media professionals have a responsibility to provide accurate and truthful information to students.

When discussing ethics in communication, we're talking about the values and norms that direct people and institutions towards using communication ethically and responsibly. It entails taking into account how communications affect certain people, communities, and society at large.

Methodology

Hypothesis: The advertisements shown prior to the main news edition are not in accordance with the educational policy of the Ministry of Education and Sports and the code of ethics.

Research Question: Is the communication aimed at educating the audience on limits in relation to the educational framework?

The method used in this case study is the observational method - the monitoring of the national TV media stations during particular time frames.

Case Study

This case study is a summary of the observations documented in audio and video formats, placing them in relation to the powers and authority that the law gives to the Albanian Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) for the regulation of the audiovisual market and the Curriculum Framework and Rules of Ethics for pre-university education.

Two of the main national audiovisual TV stations, which have the highest number of viewers and therefore the highest number of advertisements and TV time dedicated to them, have become part of this observational study.

Some of the advertisements that are repeatedly broadcast on these televisions are not in accordance with the ethical standards of MES or the legal framework for Audiovisual Media in the Republic of Albania in communicating audio-visual messages to the general public.

According to Law No. 97/2013 "FOR AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA IN THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA", amended by law no. 22/2016 dated 10.3.2016 Amended by Decision no. 56 dated 27.07.2016 of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Albania and with law no. 91/2017, Article 33, point 1, which defines "The Duties of the AAMSP" states that the audiovisual media service provider must:

1. The audio and/or audiovisual media service providers shall:
   d) respect the rules of ethics and public morals and not broadcast programs that may encourage criminal acts;
   f) ensure the protection of consumer rights;

As a result, if one of the points of this aforementioned law is not fulfilled, then the AMA must intervene by taking concrete steps according to the provisions made in the law and in the code of ethics of the Audiovisual Media Authority itself.

But how often does this happen? What are the cases that we have identified that constitute an ethical problem and that contradict the educational policy of MES and ethics in general?

According to Article 42 point 2. "Communications of a commercial nature in audiovisual broadcasts are not allowed to use ways of seducing viewers unconsciously and techniques for their suggestion. and point 5. Communications of a commercial nature in audiovisual broadcasts about alcoholic beverages are not allowed to be addressed especially to children, who must avoid their consumption by minors and must not encourage their excessive use by adults.

One of the selected cases is the advertisement of "Peja Beer" which is broadcast in a time slot in which children are part of the active audience, i.e. before the main news broadcast at 19.15 - 19.30h. This also contradicts the communication of the message because, until the last moment, it looks like an advertisement that aims to attract the viewer with the appearance of some girls and the placement of rhythmic music, which accompanies the whole advertisement in the background, which makes use of one of the most famous songs, sung by the most famous singer before the 90s, Vace Zela - a way of associating with feelings and previous experiences that originate from the past. So, here we are dealing with a way of unconsciously seducing the viewers and a technique for suggesting them through showing extravagantly dressed girls or a couple kissing at a time when the children are actively watching TV.

Another case is that of another national media and TV station, such as Top-Channel on Sunday, at 12.00, during a television show that is followed by children and adults such as 'Big Brother Fan Club', the above-mentioned advertisement appears, regardless of the time.

Additionally, there is the instance of the sexist "STELA" beer advertisement on TV KLAN at 20.03 hours, which airs before one of the most viewed episodes. The advertisement included the line, "When boys are best friends, they drink Stela beer." Also, it is evident in this advertisement that a male wearing prescription glasses is stigmatized, treated as the least attractive person, and told that no one should expect him to get a girl.

Another similar case that does not respect the time zone is ELBAR beer, which also appears on another national television and where the accompanying notice for alcoholic beverages is again missing.

Article 42, point 8, states: "Audiovisual broadcasting services must draft and implement codes of conduct regarding inappropriate communications of a commercial nature in their broadcasts, accompanying or included in programs for minors, food and beverages, that contain harmful or useless substances for the physical health of minors, especially those with a high content of fat, fatty acids,

salt, soda and sugar, which are beyond the permitted rates for a healthy food diet for minors, according to the guidelines of the AMA.

This also contradicts Article 46 point 1 - e) advertising, direct sales, direct sales materials, sponsorships, and other forms of commercial presentation, used in any broadcast service, especially those related to issues that may whether they are directly or not in the interest of minors, they must protect their interest, taking special care of their health.

Here we are dealing with a problem that is often noticed in communications, mainly for alcoholic and energy drinks, as in the case of B52, or other drinks with added sugar. These types of drinks cannot be shown at this time or must be accompanied by an instruction/voice message at the end of the advertisement, as in the case of medications, so they must be consumed only by people over 18 years old and the effects of these are harmful.

Another type of advertisement is related to medicines, such as the advertisement for a drug like PROSTAMAX, which has as its target group the middle-aged and elderly men who suffer from prostate problems. Cekja, as he is known by the general public, is a comedian, who in this case took the role of an elderly person who talks about the benefits of this medication in his sex life, and uses inappropriate language for an audience that includes children as well. This audiovisual advert is broadcast in the form of a promotional message that lasts for several minutes, with different testimonials from different users who emphasized the improvement of their sex life. This advertising message was aired on national television station KLAN on February 22, 2022, till April 28, 2022. It started at 10:00 a.m. and ran nonstop during the whole day even before before the main newscast at 7:30 p.m. Due to the language used by well-known comedian Sejfulla Myftari, popularly known as Cekja, and the fact that the entire message is presented to the public during hours when most of them are youngsters, this advertisement contains unsuitable content.

Conclusions

Advertisements in different time frames, in which children are actively watching television, are not in accordance with the ethics that are trumpeted by the law on pre-university education and the law on audio-visual broadcasts.

We can identify the violation of some articles of the law on which the Audiovisual Media Authority operates.

The public responsibility of the media, and mainly that of the national media, is to educate the audience, even though such a debate regarding the role of television as an educator is in most of the cases opposed by the media owners.

The issue at hand could be prevented and its duration minimized if AMA's complaints council and monitoring section operated effectively.

The inconvenience created by the non-functioning or non-implementation of the law on audio-visual media is an added cost for the entire education system, which on the one hand tries to educate children with civic values and on the other hand the responsible authorities do not properly implement the regulation that has been approved to precisely avoid this issue which is more than ethical, it is related to society and its consequences are more than just social.

We can cultivate an educational environment that produces knowledgeable, critical, and ethically conscious people prepared to interact with the complexities of the modern world by acknowledging the roles that education and media professionals play, abiding by codes of ethics, and approaching challenges with an ethical mindset.

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Reframing Democracy: Navigating Economic, Social and Media Obstacles in Albania's Post-Communist Era

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the challenges that Albania faces in economic development, social changes, and media transparency in a democratic, post-communist society. The analysis draws on contemporary historical sources, human rights reports, academic studies, news articles, and official governmental and non-governmental publications, correlating these findings with Albania's journey towards democratization.

Findings: The essay identifies the economic repercussions of communist governance, including prevalent unemployment and fragile market structures. It explores the social impact, linking them to issues like suppression, fear, and weakened trust in the contemporary government.

Originality/Value: This article provides an analysis of the challenges in post-communist Albania, focusing on social and economic developments and media coverage. It suggests targeted strategies for the government to strengthen democratic institutions.

Keywords: Albania, democracy, post-communism, development, media, freedom, transparency.

Introduction

Albania, a nation that has navigated various governance paradigms over the centuries, from the principality to the Ottoman occupation, to the kingdom, to communism and now to democracy as a parliamentary republic. After the fall of communism in 1991, Albania experienced very challenging social and economic changes.

"For nearly half a century Albania experienced a brand of communism unknown to the rest of Eastern Europe. A fateful blend of isolationism and dictatorship kept this tiny Balkan country the poorest and most repressive in all of Europe. During his forty-year reign, the Albanian leader Enver Hoxha banned religion, forbade travel, and outlawed private property. Any resistance to his rule was met with severe retribution, including internal exile, long-term imprisonment, and execution. His domination of Albania's political, economic, and social life was absolute.

Considering this history, Albania has made substantial progress toward respect for civil and political rights in the past five years. Democratic elections in March 1992 swept the communist party from power, installed a new government led by President Sali Berisha of the Democratic Party, and paved the way for a series of liberalizing reforms." (Human Rights Watch, 1996)

The communist regime of the leader Enver Hoxha for more than 40 years transformed Albania into an isolated, autocratic and controlled state, subjecting the populace to total oppression, where power was monopolized by an elite few people who inherited power, with a part of the people of the working class and the rest of the politically condemned. This created a wild social divide that continues today.

"At the time, Albania still retained close ties to the Soviet Union. However, from the mid-1950s, its international isolation would intensify. The new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin in 1956 and sought to normalize relations with Yugoslavia. It is hard to tell which of the two irritated Enver more. He eventually broke ties with the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies and began closely cooperating with Mao Zedong's China. By 1972, as China sought closer ties to the United States in order to compete with the USSR, Enver Hoxha also began denouncing the Chinese as "revisionists" of Marxism. By the 1970s, Albania would be in complete international isolation, best epitomized by its infamous bunkers. Built-in anticipation of a foreign invasion, 750,000 of them are scattered all over Albania to this day." (Guzvica, 2022)

The decline of the regime began ideologically after many events that happened after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and which initially began in neighbouring

countries being democratized. It was inspired by a spirit of freedom, democracy and a bright future with the slogan "Let's make Albania like all of Europe" initially by the students and intellectuals who initiated the first protests and who were massively followed by the whole people. The main moment of the very dangerous time that resulted in determination and stability where the bust of Enver Hoxha fell, a symbol of the liberation from the communist regime.

After the fall of the regime, the country faced extraordinary challenges on the road to democracy. The country had no institutions that followed democratic ideas, no strong economy and no civil society at all. The people who served in the main institutions were educated with communist ideas and were labelled enemies by a large part of the people who wanted democracy.

The transition required strong democratic reforms, and an uncorrupted democratic system in a state with a polarized population.

In the first years of the transition, the country faced many political and social upheavals. In 1992, the first multi-party democratic parliamentary elections were held, but the consequences created a great political instability between wild competitors among people who wanted to take power which created many problems in the consolidation of democratic political institutions and the construction of a new legal system.

In this essay, economic and social problems also media coverage will be addressed, how they happened and how they can be improved for a more democratic government.

Arguments. Economic consequences

The economic consequences of communism in Albania have had a lasting impact on the country's transition to democracy. Under the centrally planned economic system of the communist era, Albania experienced limited economic growth and development. The state-controlled economy stifled innovation, hindered entrepreneurship, and discouraged private-sector development (Guzvica, 2022).

Since private companies and enterprises did not exist, during the first years of the transition, the economy was very much based on enterprises that continued to be state-owned, and the challenges of privatizing these enterprises to bring them to the open market were great in its restructuring.

Today, Albania continues to grapple with economic consequences stemming from its communist past. High unemployment rates persist, especially among young people, posing social and economic concerns (Benjamin, 2021). The transition to a market economy necessitated reforms such as privatization, deregulation, and attracting foreign investment. However, these processes have been gradual and

encountered obstacles during the process. The initial privatization efforts faced issues of corruption and uneven distribution of wealth, which hindered equitable economic growth (Benjamin, 2021).

Furthermore, during the transition, market changes required the industry to further develop and modernize to be more competitive and also to improve business conditions.

Proactive Economic Reforms

In Albania, a number of structural changes are implemented to promote equitable growth, improve competitiveness and productivity, generate employment, and improve public service delivery and governance. Accelerating growth requires diversifying exports and markets alongside connecting the region to global markets. Through its economic decisions, Albania demonstrates its determination to overcome its historical economic stagnation and create a vibrant, inclusive economy. World Bank. (n.d.). Albania Overview

The Albanian economy has made great strides in the development and construction of sectors such as agriculture and tourism. However, there is room for improvement in improving the way of working and reducing informality (Benjamin, 2021).

The weak economic development has had strong consequences towards the development of democracy that is still felt today, where the minimum wage is approximately 200 euros. The consequence of this is the small development of innovation in the private sector. Although there have been developments towards a market-based economy, high unemployment mainly among young people and diversification has influenced the consolidation of transparent institutions and governmental responsibility.

The development of an open market requires the strengthening of socio-economic policies of inclusiveness and fair competition, moving away from monopoly. Opening the way for foreign investments that would promote economic growth and offer many new jobs, which necessarily brings the development of knowledge and skills for work, thus developing the economy and even education with innovative study programs that approach open world markets.

By promoting innovation in the field of technology in many sectors, the government and the people will benefit greatly in reducing costs in sectors such as infrastructure, energy and telecommunications, greatly improving the business environment and gradually transforming it into contemporary businesses and economy.

The government in cooperation with foreign organizations and international financial funds can offer small loans that people with small economic opportunities can benefit from. Thus, people will have the opportunity to become self-employed and create jobs for a few other people, gradually reducing unemployment and contributing to the development of the economy and business development in an open competitive market.

Also, the creation of policies for large international companies in the field of technology and finance would benefit the 3 branches, the government, the companies and the people.

Social consequences

The profound societal divide consequences of communism have left a lasting impact today. Decades of isolation and brutal state control limited freedoms and thoughts of creating a civil society were impossible and too dangerous. Authoritarian control curtailed freedom of expression, if you thought differently than what the party ordered, the person and the family risked exile. Gatherings and associations were unimaginable if they were not organized by the state. The result of this was a distrust of each other, fear and lack of social cohesion.

Social and cultural norms were controlled through educational institutions. Thus, the state imposed its ideologies and stopped development and critical thinking. If an intellectual wrote articles that did not conform to the required norms and ideals, if a singer created a song and was not liked by the party, if an academic made a study that did not conform to the policies, and many other cases, people were imprisoned and the family members were exiled.

"The psychological basis of identity politics lies in the feelings of humans that they possess an inner worth or dignity which the society around them is failing to recognize. The underappreciated identity may be unique to an individual, but more often it flows from membership in a group, particularly one that has suffered some form of marginalization or disrespect. Identity is intimately linked to emotions of pride, anger, and resentment based on the kind of recognition that one receives (or does not receive). Although perceived economic injustices may stimulate the demand for recognition, this drive is distinct from the material motives that impel homo economicus, and can often lead to actions that run counter to economic self-interest conventionally understood." (Fukuyama, 2020)

After the fall of communism, people who served in various government institutions were seen as enemies by the rest of the society, even though altogether they had suffered poverty. Intellectuals were labelled as communists and consequently, they were attacked politically.

Even high-ranking government officials, who were in favour of democracy suffered the criticism; some even went so far as becoming unemployed by taking on menial jobs to make ends meet.

"Of particular concern is the state's continued interference in the judiciary. Despite many improvements, the court system is still used as an instrument of the state, especially against the political opposition. The leader of the largest opposition party is currently in prison after a trial fraught with due process violations. Since 1992, numerous other critics of the government have been harassed, tried, imprisoned or, in a few cases, physically attacked by unknown assailants usually without any response from the government. Judges who make independent decisions on sensitive cases are sometimes reassigned to lesser posts or fired. More than 400 persons, predominantly selected by the Democratic Party, were appointed as judges and prosecutors throughout the country, upon completion of a special six-month law course, thereby strengthening governmental influence over the judiciary and law enforcement officials." (Human Rights Watch, 1996)

Very quickly the oppressed classes wanted to take power, but their qualification was lacking, from the educational and intellectual side, thus building a weak system where the consequences are still felt today.

The system created courses of several weeks where oppressed people could qualify. A good example is the six-month law course where people who did not even finish high school with that course became judges and prosecutors, hindering the development of a democratic legal state. Such people continue to hold high government positions today. "Albania's road to democracy has been long, at times arduous, but always directed toward a system of government that is transparent in its exercise of power and participatory in creating access points for citizens to weigh in on the affairs of state. For a society whose past is marked by a particularly severe form of communist oppression, the drive to build a democratic system based on pluralistic discourse, human rights, and inclusive decision-making is resolute, and something that has inspired NDI in its support of democratic development throughout its 30-year presence in Albania.

The timing of these investments in parliament is propitious. In the past few years, Albania has been wracked by political instability over corruption allegations, feeding public mistrust in governing institutions and the election process. The country has embarked on a long-term process to root out corruption through restructuring the judiciary, strengthening campaign finance and standing up special bodies to fight corruption--complex undertakings that seek to address the public's abiding concern about corruption, which routinely ranks as a top issue in NDI public opinion research." (Benjamin, 2021)

Since, after more than 30 years, people from different backgrounds discriminate against each other, the modern democratic state must develop inclusive practices. Encouraging civic engagement through organizational community centres.

Improving social democratic reforms with a focus on inclusiveness with a focus on the individual and human rights, encouraging dialogue for understanding between different parties and promoting awareness. Feeling that everyone's voice is heard can be promoted in a more open society and encouraging education for future generations.

Media coverage and trust

Citizens have now eroded trust in governmental institutions and this can be understood quite well from the number of voters. In the 2021 elections, out of 3.59 million residents, 1.66 million voted. (Erebara, 2021)

Studies on the spread of hate speech and misinformation in 2020 found that, even while the media isn't often the primary source, it can amplify these messages, especially in online comment sections. The persistence of misinformation in Albanian media is linked to several issues, such as weak professionalism and weak regulation. Political personalities frequently use their large media presence and social media platforms to their advantage as the main producers of misleading and controversial news. A significant factor complicating the issue is the lack of effective methods to address and reduce the increasing number of such harmful narratives within the media field. (Londo, 2021)

To rebuild trust in the government, media entities must assume a pivotal role. During the last few years, many commercial media have been built in Albania, whose purpose is advertising, where they are used in prime time with broadcasts and debates that have propaganda purposes. The media can be called linked to political parties, because every studio promotes the great work done by the government, for the media linked to the party in power, and how the government abuses power for the media linked to opposition parties. The main fact is that political advertising during the campaigns is made through the above-mentioned media.

"Freedom of the press is also circumscribed. No legislation exists to allow for the transmission of private television or radio, leaving the state-run programs that favour the government as the sole provider of news for the majority of the population. While there are many private newspapers throughout the country, they are restricted by a repressive press law and obstacles to their distribution. Since 1992, a large number of journalists, including foreign correspondents, have been harassed, arrested or beaten by unknown assailants after writing articles that were critical of the government." (Human Rights Watch, 1996)

To achieve trust, the government must build policies for the protection and freedom of the press so that the media has its own independent power. Guaranteeing journalists' lives and building a safe investigative environment are 2 main steps in building trustworthiness and credibility.

The promotion of media education, through various organizations and institutions, is an important element that helps citizens not to become victims of fake news, disinformation and misinformation.

The media gains strength and credibility through fostering positive relationships with the media, creating forums for open communication and transparency among the populace nationwide, giving voice to the voiceless and advancing inclusive policies that ensure that no one is left behind.

Conclusion

Albania's long journey from communism to democracy is an ongoing formidable challenge. The economic consequences of post-communism are strong, reflecting high levels of unemployment. The social crisis of oppression, fear and lack of trust have left strong wounds in Albanian society for all generations. The low trust and the controlled media mean that the public's perception and trust for an improvement in democratic policies in the government is low.

Bolstering the open market, the construction of inclusive policies with equal opportunities and the promotion of the construction of the media are important factors in the reconstruction of trust, which will therefore bring more awareness and inclusion. If the people will govern and the state will be more transparent.

Through these projects, the Albanian state could move from communist oppression to an open and free, inclusive democratic future for all citizens.

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The relationship between burnout, stress and social support: Study of QSUT nurses

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Abstract

*Work overload or burnout can result from the numerous and conflicting expectations placed on nurses by medical and administrative staff in addition to nurse supervisors and managers. Research conducted on nurses reveals that a significant factor in determining the level of burnout they encounter is their personal and professional ideals. In emerging nations, burnout-related work issues are becoming more prevalent in helping professions like nursing. **Purpose:** The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between social welfare and burnout caused by stress. This essentially means that managers and supervisors in the medical, administrative, and nursing fields place a number of contradicting demands on nurses in their professions. Overwork or burnout may result from this. Plan, process, and approach: Investigating if QSUT nurses feel burnout, stress, and social support is the aim of the quantitative study. There are 100 nurses in total taking part in the study 42 males and 58 women. **Design/methodology/approach:** The purpose of the quantitative study is to investigate if QSUT nurses experience Burnout, Stress, and Social Support. There are 100 nurses participating in the study in total (42 men and 58 women). **Findings:***

Analysis through the T-Test showed that there are gender differences in depletion reporting, where t (98) = 3.123, p<.05, and higher stress, where t(98)=-1.113, p<.05. So, it's women who report higher levels of stress. This analysis also showed that there are differences in personal achievement reporting, where t(98)= 3.629, p<.05. Men report higher levels of personal achievement because they have more confidence in their skills and show more ego in career performance in this profession. Analysis through the T-Test showed that there are gender differences in reporting the alliance you can rely on, where t (98) = 2.576, p<.05 and support for your values, where t(98)= 2.003, p<.05. So, it is men who report higher levels of support and support values. Men find themselves more socially supported and see themselves as a source of support for others. The results for regression/stress at work supported the hypothesis that levels of social support (social integration, support for your values) are associated with burnout variables and social integration is the most important factor affecting increased stress at work.

*   **Keywords:** *Burnout, Stress and Social Support*

Introduction

The body and mind react to perceived danger or difficulty by going into stress. It is the body's normal response to circumstances that call for modification, adaptation, or action. Stress can originate from several things, such as environmental influences, life events, and work-related pressures. Stress hormones, such as cortisol and adrenaline, are released by the body in response to stress, inducing the "fight or flight" response. (APS, 2013). Work stress among nurses is a complex issue arising from the demands and pressures of the nursing profession. Factors contributing to stress include high workload, emotional demands, staff shortages, long working hours, shift work, lack of control, interpersonal conflicts, administrative pressures, fear of errors, lack of resources, role ambiguity, patient and family expectations, and organizational culture. These factors can lead to fatigue, stress, and a lack of control over work-related decisions. Addressing work stress requires a holistic approach that includes training on stress management, implementing supportive policies, promoting a positive work environment, and ensuring adequate staffing levels. Recognizing and addressing these factors is crucial for promoting nurses' well-being and improving patient care outcomes (Moustaka, Eleni, and Theodoros C. Constantinidis, 2010). Nursing is a stressful profession due to high workloads, emotional demands, shift work, staff shortages, patient complexity, administrative demands, lack of control, physical demands, risk of infection exposure, ethical

dilemmas, and rapid changes in healthcare. These factors contribute to stress and burnout among nurses. They face demanding tasks like patient care, documentation, and communication, as well as emotional challenges like caring for critically ill patients. Staffing shortages, patient complexity, administrative tasks, lack of control, physical demands, risk of infection exposure, ethical dilemmas, and rapid changes in healthcare policies further exacerbate stress. Healthcare organizations are implementing strategies to support nurses, such as stress management resources, staffing levels, and a healthy work environment (Mohammad Hossein Khalilzadeh Naghneh,1 Mansoureh Zagheri Tafreshi,2 Manijeh Naderi,3 Nehzat Shakeri,4 Fariba Bolourchifard,5 and Naser Sedghi Goyaghaj6, 2017). Occupational stress negatively impacts individuals and companies, causing poor physical and mental health, job satisfaction, absenteeism, and turnover. It also impacts patient care standards (Bardhan R, Heaton K, Davis M, Chen P, Dickinson DA, Lungu CT. , 2019).

Exists a noteworthy correlation between stress and burnout in the nursing profession. Stress is a normal reaction to difficult circumstances, but mismanaged, long-term stress can lead to burnout—a more severe and persistent condition of physical, mental, and emotional weariness. The most important facets of the connection between stress and burnout in nurses are, Tendency to take on more workload, neglect of their needs, displacement of conflicts, rejection of developing problems, withdrawal, visible changes in behaviour, depersonalization, inner emptiness, depression, and suicide attempts. (Li, X., Jiang, T., Sun, J. et al, 2021).

Burnout is influenced by four primary forms of social support: informational, instrumental, affective, and social interaction. Through direct effect, moderation, and mediational models, social support has been demonstrated to reduce strain, interact with stressors, and alter the link between stressors and strain. A review of the literature found that social support alters perceived stressors, lowers experienced strain, and changes the stressor-strain relationship (Viswesvaran, C., Sanchez, J. I., & Fisher, J., 1999). The variety of social support resources available to long-term care nurses is not well understood, although it can help lessen stress and burnout in the workplace. Support from coworkers especially managers is crucial in lowering long-term care nurses' stress levels. In terms of emotions, practicalities, or education, social support may be helpful. ((Hall, L. M., Wodchis, W. P., & Petroz, U.; McGilton, K. S., 2007).

Because they are more closely associated with job expectations, work-related types of social support have a stronger correlation with burnout than depersonalization or personal achievement. Resources for non-work assistance exhibit the opposite tendency. When it comes to challenging professional interactions, social support has three effects: it lessens actual strain, moderates perceived stressors, and modifies the link between stressor and strain. Different

forms of social support, including informational, instrumental, and emotional support, appear to have different effects on burnout, according to empirical data. Since work-related social support is more closely associated with job expectations, it is more strongly associated with burnout than depersonalization or personal achievement. Resources for non-work assistance exhibit the opposite tendency. When it comes to challenging professional interactions, social support has three effects: it lessens actual strain, moderates perceived stressors, and modifies the link between stressor and strain. Different social support sources, such as informational, instrumental, and emotional support, may have different effects on burnout, according to empirical findings. Future research should consider the possibility that gender moderates the relationship between social support and burnout. Because they are more closely associated with job expectations, work-related types of social support have a stronger correlation with burnout than depersonalization or personal achievement (Thoits, 2011). In difficult professional interactions, social support has three effects: it lessens felt strain, modifies perceived stressors, and modifies the link between stressor and strain (Halbesleben, 2006). Long-term care nursing personnel have access to several forms of social support that may help reduce stress and burnout at work, but their availability is not widely known.

Materials and Methods

The participants were the nurses of QSUT. N=100 nurses were included in this study

58% were female and 42% male and according to these age groups 24-34 years old, (25%), 35-45 years old (36%), 46-56 years old (24%) over 56 years old (15%), their experience of work varies from 1-5 years-16-20 years. The questionnaires that were used for the realization were: Maslach's Burnout Syndrome Inventory, MBI", Social Support Scale (Cutrona C.E., Russell D, 1987) and Nursing Work Stress Inventory (NSI) Maslach (Maslach, C.; Jackson, S.E.; Leiter, M.P. Maslach, 1996).

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive data on gender and burnout are presented below. According to the data presented in the table, it results that at the low level, there are 22% of men and 23% of women, at the moderate level there are 14% of men and 15% of women, while at the high level of burnout, there are 6% men and 20% women.

Gender and burnout

(Burnout) *Gender Crosstabulation			Gender		Total
Male Female					
Burnout	Low level of Burnout	Count	22	23	45
		% Within (burnout)	48.9%	51.1%	100.0%
		% Within gender	52.4%	39.7%	45.0%
		% of Total	22.0%	23.0%	45.0%
	Moderate level of Burnout	Count	14	15	29
		% Within (burnout)	48.3%	51.7%	100.0%
		% Within gender	33.3%	25.9%	29.0%
		% of Total	14.0%	15.0%	29.0%
	High level of Burnout	Count	6	20	26
		% Within (burnout)	23.1%	76.9%	100.0%
		% Within gender	14.3%	34.5%	26.0%
		% of Total	6.0%	20.0%	26.0%
Total % Within (burnout) % Within gender % of Total		Count	42	58	100
		42.0%	58.0%	100.0%	
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
		42.0%	58.0%	100.0%	

Gender and Stress

The graph below shows the relationship between work stress and gender. According to him, 20% of men and 8% of women have a low level of stress at work. At the moderate level, 14% are men and 24% are women. At the high level it turns out that there are 5% men and 19% women, while at the very high level there are 3% men and 7% women. According to the data, it seems clear that it is women who show high levels of stress compared to men.
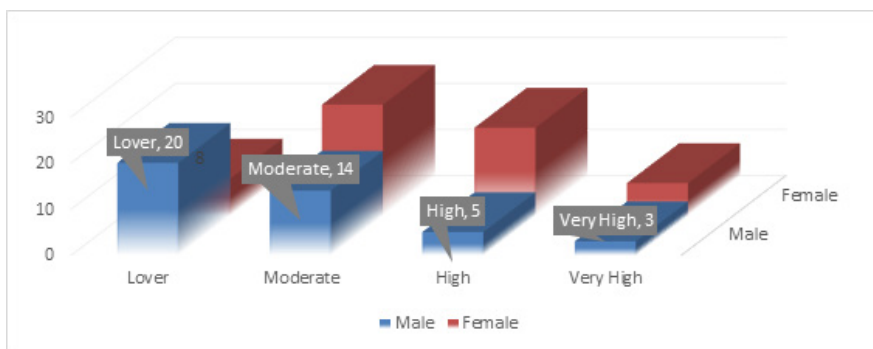
Gender and social support

According to the table presented in the lower level, there are 0 men and 5 women. At the moderate level, there are 18 men and 42 women. As for the high level of social support, it turns out that there are 24 men and 11 women.

Social support * Gender Crosstabulation					
Male Female			Gender		Total
Social support	Low level	Count	0	5	5
		% Within Social support	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% Within Gender	0.0%	8.6%	5.0%
		% of Total	0.0%	5.0%	5.0%
	Moderate level	Count	18	42	60
		% Within Social support	30.0%	70.0%	100.0%
		% Within Gender	42.9%	72.4%	60.0%
		% of Total	18.0%	42.0%	60.0%
	High level	Count	24	11	35
		% Within Social support	68.6%	31.4%	100.0%
		% Within Gender	57.1%	19.0%	35.0%
		% of Total	24.0%	11.0%	35.0%
Total % Within Social support % Within Gender % of Total		Count	42	58	100
		42.0%	58.0%	100.0%	
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
		42.0%	58.0%	100.0%	

Age differences in reporting burnout (ANOVA)

N Max.		Burnout Mean	Standard Deviation	Descriptive Standard Error.		95% Cofidence Under	Interval for Over	Mean	Min.
24-34 age	25	16.2	9.7	1.95		12.6	20.2	1	36
35-45 age	36	17.97	13.4	2.24		13.4	22.5	1	48
46-56 age	24	14.58	10.7	2.19		10.1	19.1	1	48
< 56 age	15	12.13	9.6	2.49		6.7	17.4	1	32
Total	100	18.84	11.45	1.14		13.5	18.1	1	48

In the table of Descriptive Statistics, the average Burnout reported by people in the age group of 24-34 years, the average of Burnout is 16.2, with SD= 9.7, among people who belong to the age group of 35-45 years is 17.97, with SD= 13.4, among people for the age group 46-56 years old, the average is 14.58 with SD= 10.7, as well as for people over 56 years old, the average is 12.13 with SD= 9.65. The average lowest limit for people aged 24-34 years is 12.6, for people who belong to the age group 35-45 years old it is 13.4, for people aged 46-56 years old the average is 10.1, as well as for people aged over 56 years old is 6.7. The average highest limit is for people in the age group of 24-34 years, and the average highest limit is 20.2, for people who belong to the age group of 35-45 years, it is 22.5, for people of the age group of 46-56 years, the average is 19.1, as and for people over 56 years old it is 17.4. The minimum reported level of burnout at work for people aged 24-34 years is 1, for people aged 35-45 it is 1, for people aged 46-56 years it is 1 and for people over 56 years old it is 1 The maximum reported level of burnout at work among persons aged 24-34 years is 36, among persons aged 35-45 years is 48, among persons aged 46-56 years is 48 and among persons over 56 years old. is 32. The participants were 25 people aged 24-34, 36 aged 35-45, 24 aged 46-56 and 15 over 56.

Homogeneity of variance test

Bornout Levene	statistic	df.1	df.2	df.3
	1.927	3	96	.130

The results obtained from the Homogeneity of Variance Test test whether the variances of the four groups are the same. p value= .130. If p is less than or equal to α (α= .05), the assumption that the variances are homogeneous is rejected. The significant p-value is .130, that is, greater than α, and consequently the assumption on the homogeneity of variance is quite satisfactory.

Discussion

Three questionnaires were given to each of the 100 participants in the study's selected sample. The sample's age spans from 24 to less than 56 years old. Chart 2's age graphic displays that the age group of 35–45 years old makes up 36% of the sample, while the 24–34-year-old age group makes up 25%. Different age groups experience burnout, work-related stress, and social support in different ways. One of the sample's demographics, gender, reveals that the majority of the sample's participants are women, who exhibit higher levels of stress and burnout along with lower levels of social support. This is because there were more women in the sample overall, which is also supported by the literature and other studies. Halbesleben discovered that there were no differences in correlations between the three characteristics of burnout (personal achievement, depersonalization, and emotional weariness) and social support as a source (Halbesleben, 2006).

When social support sources were considered as moderators, however, it was discovered that work-related social support sources were more strongly linked to burnout than depersonalization or personal accomplishment due to their closer association to job expectations. When it came to non-work support resources, the opposite pattern was observed. The author made two suggestions for implications at the conclusion of the piece. Initially, distinct social support sources (such as emotional, instrumental, and informational support) might impact the three burnout components differently, and more research of this kind could clarify how those kinds of resources interact with the burnout dimensions. Second, there's a chance that gender will moderate the link between burnout and social support. Future studies examining the connection between burnout and support must consider gender. Employee burnout at counselling centres was examined by (Ross, R.R., Altmaier, E.M., & Russel, D.W., 1989) in relation to difficult work situations and social support. Four sources of social support were explored in their study: friends/relatives, spouse, coworkers, and supervisors. While support from spouses and friends/relatives had no discernible effect on burnout in an organizational environment, it was discovered that social support from supervisors and coworkers was linked to reduced levels of burnout but did not operate as a moderator. Additionally, they discovered that certain types of support (such as security, a dependable alliance, and access to food) as well as age, experience, and married status were linked to reduced levels of burnout. They concluded that the consequence of employment demands for an individual receiving specific types of social support from various sources of the differential relationship should be taken into consideration. Work experience, another demographic of the study group,

ranging from 1-5 years to over <20 years of work experience. The findings of the graphic representation of work experience show that the intervals of 1–5 years (22%), and 11–15 years (23%) make up the bulk of the sample. This is represented in graph 3. The distribution of social support, stress, and burnout varies depending on the stage of a worker's career. Work experience, another demographic of the study group, ranging from 1-5 years to over <20 years of work experience. The findings of the graphic representation of work experience show that the intervals of 1–5 years (22%), and 11–15 years (23%) make up the bulk of the sample. This is represented in graph 3. The distribution of social support, stress, and burnout varies depending on the stage of a worker's career.

The ANOVA table results indicated that the tiredness level varies statistically significantly with age, with F (3, 96) = 1.045, p<.05 rejecting the null hypothesis. The average burnout level for nurses is 16.2 for those in the 24-34 age range, 17.97 for those in the 35-45 age range, 14.58 for those in the 46-56 age range, and 12.13 for those above 56. This can be explained by the fact that nurses between the ages of 35 and 45 lack enough coping strategies to handle the demands of their jobs.

To summarize, the reduction of burnout through social support is more effective when it is viewed as originating from diverse sources and taking on different forms, as opposed to when it is viewed as a universal notion. Furthermore, there is not enough empirical evidence to draw a broad judgment on the mitigating role that social support has in reducing job stress and job burnout. In the end, it seems that the coexistence of direct and moderated impact theories is supported by the current literature assessment (Viswesvaran, C., Sanchez, ,J. I., & Fisher, J., 1999)

Conclusion

In summary, stress resulting from staff issues such as inadequate staff management, inadequate resources, and security risks is the primary factor influencing burnout and job satisfaction among nurses, and perhaps other health professionals as well. Burnout affects a nurse's mental health and well-being, which probably affects performance, productivity, and the standard of patient care. In addition to reducing the level of burnout, the staff must be instructed to cope with and manage stress and increase the level of job satisfaction, which can also affect the reduction of the negative effects of burnout on nurses' overall health. This might be accomplished by implementing evidence-based policies designed to improve work environments for nurses, giving them the tools, they need to do their jobs well and feeling more secure, ultimately leading to better patient and nurse outcomes.

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China Revitalized Through Memory in the Novel "Ivory Dragon", by Fatos Kongoli

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Abstract

The subject of this novel takes shape and begins and elaborates on an event in the 90s, when Genci Skampa, a reporter in a daily newspaper, is invited to a meeting of journalists from the Balkan Peninsula in the capital of France, Paris. The events and destinies of the characters, who sometimes surrender to memory and sometimes return to objective reality, follow a trajectory that is not at all chronological, moving from Tirana, towards Beijing, then towards Paris and vice versa. However, the road remains one and only, and the main theme of this work is about the life of the Albanian student in Beijing during the 60s, of the last century, centred on the university corps of that city, where young people who came almost from prosperous communist countries world, they experience redemption and freedom for the first time, but this freedom remains conditioned under the unspeakable atmosphere for the mentality of these teenagers, that of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. At that time, i.e. in his student years, the young Albanian Genci Skampa met and fell in love with the elegant Chinese student, Sui Lin.

In the chapters of this novel, all the deformations of living as well as the occasional contrasts are arranged somewhat carelessly: the permanent pressure exerted by the wild discipline, the silent temptations, but also the spiritual and psychological related disturbances that one experiences during the experience of first love. At the same time, some elements and phenomena make up a somewhat separate world, forged by events and people who leave behind indelible traces, imbued with pronounced notes of lyricism and drama at the same time, gradually transforming into shadows of the past that haunts the protagonist of this novel on his way back from Beijing to Tirana, but also that of his departure years later from Tirana to Paris, to crucify the main character forever in the memory.

Keywords: *love, Albanian, Chinese, student, memory.*

China revitalized through memory in the novel "ivory dragon", by Fatos Kongoli

Literature in all its dimensions remains a space and possibility of communication between many peoples and undoubtedly between their cultures, which outlines not only the distinction between different societies of human communities but also naturally reinforces the notion of nation.

The ways and forms of coexistence between these nations have recognized and continue to affect the most unique relationships between them, starting from the commercial, military, diplomatic, etc., but undoubtedly in these developments with the most diverse rhythms and directions, literature compared to other genres and genres of artistic practices, it occupies a place that no other approach or effort can replace.

In some cases, this form of coexistence has continued even in periods when politics, with its unstable nature and conditioned by circumstances and geostrategic factors, set in motion with all its visible and invisible mechanisms, has faced dilemmas or serious conflicts between countries. This repeated phenomenon throughout history has occupied a by no means accidental corner in Albanian Literature, it is enough to mention such important authors and works that belong to different periods and ordinal systems such as; Twilight of the Eastern Gods, The Great Winter or The Concert by Ismail Kadare, Hasta la Vista or Night of Ustika by Petro Marko and what constitutes the uniqueness of this approach is the novel Ivory Dragon by Fatos Kongoli.

Due to the fact that well-known authors such as Kadare or Marko, for the important role that their work has played in the currents of literature, are widely treated within but also beyond the contours of Albanian thought, it is very

interesting to analyze the novel Ivory Dragon of Kongoli. The subject of this novel begins and elaborates in the 90s, when Genci Skampa who works as a reporter in a daily newspaper, is invited to a meeting of selected journalists from the Balkan in the capital of France in Paris.

The events and destinies of the characters, who sometimes are surrendered to memories and sometimes returned to objective reality, follow a trajectory that is not at all chronological, moving from Tirana, towards Beijing, then to Paris and vice versa. However, the road remains one and only, and the main theme of this work is about the life of the Albanian student in Beijing during the 60s, of the last century, focused on the university corps of that city, where young people who came almost from prosperous communist countries the world, they experience for the first time the freedom and redemption of the young age, but this freedom remains conditional under the unspeakable atmosphere for the mindset of these teenagers, staying throughout that life fragment strained under the pressure exerted on the entire society of those years The Chinese Cultural Revolution. The unfolding of the protagonists' drama revolves around the climate created and intertwined between interlocutors of languages and nationalities from around the world and beyond, the narrative transcends itself in unlimited time and space, where the main character finds himself stuck by the nightmares of memory and neglect he encounters and experience years later in the free European world.

There will always be a point or milestone or even a motif where everyone feels the need to stop and look back in time, or even within themselves, facing the gravity that the future brings. At that time, i.e. in his student years, the young Albanian Genci Skampa met and fell in love with the graceful and fragile Chinese student, Sui Lin. In this idyll and love relationship born between young people, the dilemma revolves around the only question repeated time after time in the consciousness of everyone who experienced those beautiful but also difficult years at the same time: Can there be hope to build a future feeling of an Albanian boy with a beautiful Chinese girl, this love protected in the conditions and circumstances dictated by social-political resonances?

In the chapters of this novel, there are listed all the deformations of living somewhat carelessly, as well as the occasional contrasts that the atmosphere around the lives of the characters of this novel experienced. The pronounced notes of lyricism but also of tragedy, that are felt in the compositional spirit, embodied in the entire bed where the subject of this work lies and develops, intertwine between them not only as a connecting element between the chapters of the novel but also as a re-establishment in an almost ethereal scene of parts of a drama, almost bordering on the absurd. The drama of Genc Skampa in all the chapters of the novel appears in the conditions of a self-judgment of the main hero, raised on the motives and contexts of the events that happened in conditions outside of any

normal imagination and created in well-observed environments, gaining to some extent a self-control under the strict measures exercised by the wild discipline, in contrast to the silent temptations but also the spiritual and psychological connection disturbances that one experiences during the experience of first love.

The day would come when Genci, suddenly awakened from a nightmare that had been lurking in his consciousness for a long, long time, trying to connect through the memory that reawakened to appear complete, alcove and side of some fragments lives separated from each other, summed up in the fatality of some almost defeated lives in this novel, Kongoli brings himself back transformed in the fate of this protagonist who has remained hostage to the conflict and the era that he had to experience throughout his life. In the atmosphere created between two countries but also at the same time two distant ends of the planet, human lives have been built unknowingly, protected with an unusual, almost hallucinatory mentality.

At the same time, some elements and phenomena make up a somewhat separate world, forged by events and people who leave behind indelible traces, imbued with pronounced notes of lyricism and tragedy at the same time, gradually transforming into shadows of the past that haunts the protagonist of this novel on the way back from Beijing to Tirana, but also that of his departure years later from Tirana to Paris, to eternally crucify the main character in the hons of memory.

When he returned to his past through this novel, the author himself would define with these words; "The book that tired me the most and took the longest to finish is The Ivory Dragon, a novel that I thought I would finish very quickly, but the opposite happened. This book is related to the time I was a student in China from 1961 to 1963, but I started writing it in the years of democracy. At that time, I didn't even think of such a thing. The publication was finished in 1999. I returned it several times and I could not solve the idea I had in mind, but after a lot of work, I finished it. This work, which I thought was easier for me, turned out to be longer in terms of publishing. This book tired me out (Kongoli, 2014).

In this perspective, we would like to emphasize precisely not only the concentration of creative energies on the irrevocable past utilizing optics that lie between two opposite ends; of yesterday and today, but also on the fact known since the time of Homer, as he described the return of Ulysses to Ithaca, to understand that returns are always exhausting and thus they last, beyond all imagination, as long as the years that bind them with the intended subject or objective.

It is no surprise at all that Kongoli returns at different times to his somewhat isolated corner of the writer and through it begins to tell about some social as well as artistic motives that influenced the creation of this important novel. In the interview given to the well-known French writer Jacques Jouet, the connection

between the novel *Ivory Dragon* and the novel The Palace of Dreams, a very important work in the history of Chinese literature, is extensively touched upon.

In this joint conversation between the two authors, Jouet focuses precisely not only on the content but also on the subtext where a meeting point between the two novels is observed. As the well-known journalist Jacques Jouet asks the question; "In the Ivory Dragon reminds you of a scene from the book Dream in the Red Palace, a classic Chinese novel, where the character is cured by inhaling some tobacco from the West. Isn't smoking from the West carcinogenic?

Regarding the submission of such a question by the French journalist, which aims to shed light on this somewhat hidden labyrinth, but which creates a not-at-all-random corridor that connects these two novels, Fatos Kongoli does not hesitate to give his explanation regarding the influence of natural but also the meeting point with classical Chinese literature but also on the open and timeless background that lures the far west; "I have captured this moment from the novel in question, very famous in classical Chinese literature, because in my opinion, in the given historical context, this was a beautiful, universal metaphor.

The China of that era was immersed in immobility, nothing moved. During the endless decades of dictatorship in Albania, hermetically isolated from the outside world, especially from the West, this appeared before our eyes as a mirage. The West above all was a space of freedom, which we lacked cruelly, freedom of ideas, of thought, etc. The West represented the great values of humanity in all areas of life and progress. But, of course, beyond this metaphor, in the given historical context, I agree with you, that any type of tobacco, even if it comes from the West, is carcinogenic. As an Albanian, I know this very well", (Kongoli, 2011).

It is worth emphasizing a fact that is by no means accidental, but on the contrary quite obvious that unfolds in this work, since the Ivory Dragon restores in a way of change and communication with Chinese culture, after reflecting an honorable climate full of surprises which version of the disturbances and two-way tensions that existed in Ismail Kadare's novel Winter of Great Solitude, in which, among other things, are the crises that led to the big four of reflection in several decades of silence between other countries and Albania.

In general, the returns are always late and not at all easy to be faced by both camps, the spaces and societies that the latter represent, but literature in this aspect has often assumed the decisive role by first submitting to truth and a fair relationship established between the two countries.

Fatos Kongoli's novels, mainly those belonging to the cycle Prisons of Memory, have messed up and laid a unique track in the form that the Albanian novel would take after the fall of the dictatorship. The author himself would express himself regarding this role played by his literary corpus with the attitude and view that: "However, I think that most of my novels are built like ellipses, have an ellipsoidal

structure. They start at a given point, expand, to end at another point, symmetrical to the starting point, but with a displacement in time and space. Perhaps this is a reflection of my early mathematical background. At least that's my preference, I aim to find the shortest paths to get from the start point to the endpoint (Kongoli, 2011).

Critical and scientific thought has already accepted this principle as a right that, as far as the compositional side is concerned, belongs only to the author, who not only intuitively but also with full awareness has been able to shake the conscience within me but then also the collective one, returning to the past not only as an impossible mission but moreover with the high goal of increasing the role and protagonist of everyone against the objective reality. According to this attitude, only through free and unconditional thought will it be possible to build such a future where the life of the individual cannot be pre-ordained towards a rigid framework, within which he would never want to suppress his years, dreams and aspirations as a human being and part of the activity and evolution of all humanity.

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