

**THE RECONSTRUCTION OF ALBANIAN POLITICS AND IDENTITY IN THE  
CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE RECONSTRUCTION OF ALBANIAN POLITICS AND IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**

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This thesis analyses the change of the Albanian national identity and ideology during its contemporary history, beginning from the national awakening period up to post-communism. The break with the dictatorial Enver Hoxha regime marked the beginning of a new era for the Albanian ideology and politics. To this regard, the political elite played a prominent role in the process of transition and the opening of Albania to the world. The prospect for the EU membership became the major motivation of the Albanian political class for the break with the past authoritarian regime and change. The European integration process has notably affected political elite's imagination of Albanian culture and history and Albania's place in Europe. The desire for a rapid integration urged Albanian political elite to re-establish the relations with neighbouring countries by re-designing the foreign policy in compliance with the new imperatives of geopolitics.

Keywords: Albanian Identity, European Identity, European Integration, Albanian Political Discourse, Albanian History.

## ÖZ

### AVRUPA ENTEGRASYONU ÇERÇEVESİNDE ARNAVUTLUK SİYASETİNİN VE KİMLİĞİNİN YENİDEN OLUŞTURULMASI

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Bu çalışma, ulusal aydınlanma döneminden başlayarak komünizm sonrası günümüz Arnavutluk siyasal yapısı içinde ulusal kimlik ulusal kimlik ve ideolojisinde düzeyindeki değişiklikleri incelemektedir. Enver Hoxha rejimin yıkılması Arnavutluk ideolojisi ve siyaseti için yeni bir çağın başlangıcını simgelemektedir. Bu bağlamda, siyasi seçkin kesim geçiş sürecinde ve Arnavutluk'un dünyaya açılmasında çok önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Muhtemel AB üyeliği, geçmiş otoriter rejimle bağları koparmak ve değişim için Arnavutluk siyasi sınıfının temel motivasyonu olmuştur. Avrupa entegrasyon süreci, siyasi seçkinlerin Arnavutluk kültür ve tarihi ile Arnavutluk'un Avrupa'daki yerini simgelemelerini belli bir biçimde etkilemiştir. Hızlı bir entegrasyon arzusu Arnavut siyasal seçkinlerini, dış politikayı, siyasal yapısını ve komşu ülkelerle ilişkilerini yeniden oluşturmaya itmiştir.

Anahtar Kelime: Arnavut Kimliği, Avrupa Kimliği, Avrupa Entegrasyonu, Arnavutluk Siyasal Söylemi, Arnavutluk Tarihi.

To my dear parents ...

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AECT - Agreement of Economic Cooperation and Trade
- APL - Albanian Party of Labour
- ANLF - Anti-fascist National Liberation Front
- CARDS - Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization
- CEE - Central Eastern Europe
- CP - Communist Party
- DP - Democratic Party
- CSCE - Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
- ECE - East Central Europe
- KLA - Kosova Liberation Army
- PHARE - Pologne- Hongrie assistance à la restructuration des économies
- SEE - South East Europe
- SAA - Stabilization and Association Agreement
- SAP - Stabilization and Association Process
- SP - Socialist Party

## INTRODUCTION

The anti-communist revolutions of 1989-1991 signed the irreversible break of the Eastern Europe with the communist tradition and marked the redrawing of the East-West relations. The large scope of change that was initiated in the early 1990s among other things led to identity confusion and pessimism, which the new governments of Central and Eastern Europe tried to overcome by a decisive lean on Europe. The change also affected the Western Europe, which faced great challenges as a result of the changing world order. Europe was constrained at launching a new set of policies and initiatives, including the European enlargement, for assuring stability and development in the emerging democracies of the Eastern Europe.

The communist era was especially an important one for the consolidation of Albanian nation and the development of Albanian national identity. After being fed for more than forty years with constant self-aggrandising propaganda, in the post-1991 period, affected by the world processes, Albanians entered into a process of change of self-perception. As generally accepted, this process was reinforced by the internal vacuum caused by the lack of a pre-war democratic tradition compared to the rest of Central and Eastern Europe. Yet, since the creation of the first democratic government in 1991, Albania radically altered its political orientation, which affected not only the politico-economic system, but also its foreign policy and the relations with important international organizations. However, the marginality and the pejorative representation of Albania due to political instability and its location in the Balkans affected negatively the Western perception about the country.

This work developed out of the concern with the cultural discourse of the countries of East Central Europe. After that these countries claimed their cultural belongingness to Western Europe and begin referring to their region as 'Central

Europe', they were recognized in the West as European countries and were given the prospect of EU membership in a relatively short period of time. On the basis of the self-claimed European identity the European Commission in 1997 recommended the opening of the membership talks with the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, along Estonia, Cyprus and Slovenia, but it refused advancing the relations with Turkey. These practices indicate that the ECE countries were treated on the basis of 'Europeanness' whereas the fact that neither Turkey nor the Balkans were considered for the EU enlargement during the 1990s, and to a certain extent today, tell us that the EU was trying to preserve the boundary between Europe and non-Europe. Many like to interpret the inclusion of the so-called Central Europe into the EU in relation to the principles of democracy and liberal market economy. However, a closer analysis can help comprehending that the successful identity politics strategy which involved the emergence of Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary as 'Central Europe' and their efforts on reconstructing their histories and cultures, played a major role in the inclusion of these countries in the EU enlargement at the first place. Indeed, not only did the countries of Central Europe find themselves at the head of the queue for the EU membership, but also the EU eastern enlargement itself was initiated for privileging this region.

This thesis offers a short historical survey and analysis of the processes of political, identity and cultural change that shaped the contemporary Albania. It engages specifically with the changes in the Albanian political discourse and the impact of Europe and the European enlargement on the Albanian politics, cultural identity, and history. The crisis-ridden Albania is a principally interesting case given that it indicates how the aspirations of joining Europe operate in a country experiencing the harshest totalitarian regime, and how they underpin political, historical and cultural processes. The experience of 1997 crisis and 1999 Kosova war made Albanians more conscious about the fact that the issues of political consolidations and national integrity carry a great importance in both building a democratic Albanian state and bringing Albania near Europe.

Under the light of this framework, the subject matter of this thesis is to discuss how the Albanian politics operates in the post-communist era with respect to Europe and European values such as democracy, political pluralism and law enforcement. More importantly the aim is to see whether may be any attempt of the Albanian political elites to redesign their history, their culture and national identity in such a way as to support the prospect of EU membership. In order to achieve this, first, the Albanian political spectrum is presented in order to get familiar with the post-communist political elites, the ways they behave and the complexities they bear. Second, for the purpose of analyzing the cultural and political aspects of the Albanian political discourse on Europe, interviews are conducted with some political personalities who represent the two major Albanian political parties. These interviews are intended to show how the Albanian political elite conceptualize Europe, and how they represent their country with respect to Europe in the framework of European integration. Indeed, the main question of this dissertation is whether Albania, like the other countries of Eastern and Western Europe, is, for the purpose of getting closer to Europe, reconstructing its representation of national identity with respect to Europe, by emphasizing in any way its cultural affinity to Europe.

This thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter aims at pointing to the traditional relations between the 'East' and the 'West' and the persistence of these images after the shattering of the Old World Order in the early 1990s. Besides, the reconstruction of the images of the Orient, the Eastern Europe and the Balkans as antagonist to the 'West' and the 'Europe' are discussed. The reasons why the westerners traditionally treated the 'East' and the 'Eastern Europe' as their cultural 'other' and resolutely as non-European are introduced. In the last section, inspired by the fact that some foreign and native scholars have treated Albania as the 'other' of Europe, Albania is analyzed in relation to the concepts of 'Orient', 'Eastern Europe' and the 'Balkans'.

In the second chapter the example of 'Central Europe' is given as a model of successful identity politics, which, despite the inherent problems of the legacy of communism, attained the prospect of EU membership in a short period of time. The

selected literature on the development of the project of 'Central Europe' serves clues and incentives for the other ex-communist countries of Eastern Europe aiming a successful 'return to Europe'. In the first section of the chapter the way the idea of 'Central Europe' emerged in the countries of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland is offered. This part provides details about the claimed cultural, historical and religious affinity and commonality between this invented region, literally Central Europe, and Western Europe. In the second section, the way the cultural discourse on Central Europe was transformed into a major political ambition and how the project of Central Europe was recognized in the West, is discussed. It is seen that the salient successful identity politics of Central Europe paved the road to the EU decision on an Eastern enlargement, which provided also the basic dynamics of European enlargement. In the last section, the economic and the political reforms launched in the countries of the so-called Central Europe in order to redesign the institutions and economies, according to European model, are generally presented.

The third chapter is organized into two major sections. The first section presents a historical review of the construction of the contemporary Albanian national identity. It starts from the national awakening of the late nineteenth century and goes through the monarchy period and the totalitarian communist regime, and concludes with the present post-communist era. Right through this section, the myths and national elements that contributed to the creation of a distinguished Albanian identity based on the historical continuity, language, race and culture by superseding the religious and regional differences are portrayed. On the other side, the impact of strong authoritarian regimes like that of King Zogu and Enver Hoxha on the formation of social integrity and cohesion that led to the consolidation of Albanian national identity is stressed. Along the disappearance of the beliefs concerning the uniqueness of Albanian race, language and many other elements that maintained the country alive and united during the last century, the myth of the 'West' was created in the post-communist era.

The second section covers the political changes in the post-communist Albania. It offers a clear view of the country's political spectrum and the emergence of the

Socialist and Democratic Parties as the main pillars of Albanian post-communist politics. In this analysis the political elite's tendency not to comply with the principles of democracy and to continue the tradition of authoritarian regimes and the divided political arena, is presented. It shows that the Albanian transition to liberal democracy happened to be more difficult than imagined, not only because of the large scope of change but also for the reason that the political elite failed at making a definite break from the authoritarian past.

The fourth chapter engages primarily on the discussing the formal Albania-EU relations with reference to the Stabilization and Association Process. The aim is to illustrate how the EU governs Albania through the conditionality, which guides, monitors and evaluate Albania along the way to Europe. Along this, how EU perceives Albania and what images does the Western Europe employs regarding Albania will be discussed in details.

In the fifth chapter the focus is on the drawing of a general thematic coming from interviews held with some Albanian politicians from the two main parties, which is strengthened by some articles present in the national written media. The way the political elite emphasize Albania's historical and geographical place in Europe is presented. The claimed 'Europeanness' of Albania underpins other cultural and historical processes, which go back to the fifteenth century and depict the Albanian wars under the leadership of national hero, Skënderbeg, against the Ottomans as wars of defending the European civilization and Christianity from the attacks of the Ottomans. The Albanian political discourse on 'Europeanness' highlights the common values of Albania and Europe which according to the Albanian politicians are based on their wish for freedom, democracy, religious and ethnic cohabitation, and diversity. Together with this, it is observed that although the idea of ethnic Albania is still alive mainly in the Albanian communities outside the contemporary Albanian territories, European enlargement dynamics eliminate all the possibilities of a unification of the ethnic Albanian territories in the Balkans. In this context, the main argument is that the dynamics of European enlargement have a strong effect on the reconstruction of the representation of Albanian national history and culture not

only through an active invention of the past, but also by the drawing of the main lines of the internal and regional politics of the present and the future.



## CHAPTER 1

### THE IMAGES OF DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE 'EAST' AND THE 'WEST' OF EUROPE

The collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe and the transformation of the World Order created new dynamics in European politics. Even though various images and conceptualizations of a 'united Europe' and a 'Europe without frontiers' were constructed and imagined in the aftermath of 1989, in the short term they all failed and the shadow of the bipolar world still persisted in the post-communist Europe. Consequently, the images of distinctions between 'East' and 'West' still exist in the Europe of post-Cold War since it was impossible to immediately obliterate the 'old' mental mapping of Europe. These images of 'difference' between the 'East' and the 'West' interact with European enlargement processes and carry a serious potential of affecting its general flow and procedure.

The irreversible processes of European integration and enlargement are indeed, not occurring in a cultural vacuum. Rather they are carried out not merely on the basis of formally arranged EU criteria and policies but also they are affected and shaped by the cultural discourse on the 'West' and 'Europe'. This is because the old images and imaginations on 'Europe' still operate and play a leading role in the European enlargement process. The terrain in which European integration and enlargement processes take place is bound to the political and cultural differentiation of European geography which lies on the differences of the 'West' and 'Europe' from the rest, namely the 'East' and the 'Eastern Europe'. The images that enforce the role of 'Europe' as the centre of world civilization, which totally differentiate it from the 'East', stem from the principles and beliefs lying on experiences of Eurocentrism, Orientalism and Communism.

Hence, European integration and enlargement processes are not developing in a geographical context either, since Europe is not anymore determined geographically but politically and culturally. For the purpose of uncovering this political and cultural terrain where European politics is made from the vantage point of Western Europe, it is crucial to analyze the construction of 'East'-'West' relations in European environment. The division between the West and the non-West is one the greatest divisions of contemporary history which 'marks the difference between inside and outside' and is reproduced many times at the 'local frontiers of cultural pluralism' (Nederveen Pieterse, 1994:129).

Basically, the Western identity construction lies on a strong sense of European narcissism and Eurocentrism. Eurocentrism is a practice where 'Europe' is approached 'as Narcissus approached the pool, looking only for a reflection of his own beauty' (Davies, 1996:16). Eurocentrism is not a banal ethnocentrism but it is 'a specifically modern phenomenon that did not flourish until the nineteenth century' (Amin, 1988: vii). In this perspective 'it constitutes one dimension of the culture and ideology of modern capitalist world' (Amin, 1988: vii).

Still, there is little consensus on the period when 'Europe' and the institutionalized images of difference between the 'East' and the 'West' were constructed. The idea of 'Europe' until the late fifteenth century was mainly geographical and subordinated to the Christendom, which was the dominant identity of the time (Delanty, 1995: 30). However, the idea of 'Europe' as the 'West' was consolidated during the confrontations with Islam throughout the crusades (Delanty, 1995: 30). It is against the 'East' and Orient that 'Europe' became referred to as the 'West'. For a long time there has been a mainstream Europe characterized by wealth and established political regimes, and a marginal Europe defined by 'poverty, vulnerability to invasion, and imperial domination' (Judt, 1998-99: 64). Europeans from the age of Renaissance became conscious that 'the conquest of the world by their civilization is henceforth a possible objective' and from that period of break in the history of humanity they developed 'a sense of absolute superiority' (Amin, 1988: 72-73).

GoGwilt explains that Europe's identity was shaped through the medieval crusades, which provide a historical grounding point for the construction of the opposition between the 'East' of Islam and the 'West' of Christendom (1995: 40). From that period on, the images of 'Europe' were confused with the images of the 'West' and the 'Western civilization'. This paved the way for the construction of a certain belief in Europe according to which, everything 'Western' was civilized, and everything civilized was 'Western' (Davies, 1996: 19). Conversely, everything 'Eastern' was pushed to the other end of civilization axis, which consists of backwardness, inferiority, barbarism, and poverty. Generally speaking, the idea of 'Europe' has been around for more than a thousand years, but it completed itself during the experiences of Renaissance, Industrial Revolution and finally at the age of Enlightenment.

'Europe' and the 'West' are represented as entities that are constructed in a progressing line through the experiences of ancient Greece, Roman Empire, Christianity, Renaissance, and Enlightenment up to contemporary Europe. This unity and unilinearity in the development of 'Europe' is claimed to make up the basis of unity in European identity and culture in the contemporary history. What problematizes 'Europe' is that these historical developments are presented as only being unique to European history, and as if it was the 'model' and the 'ideal' way of development. The belief on the existence of a common European culture has been implemented to underpin more technical, legal and economic aspects of the integration process (Shore, 2000: 40). In this sense, the 'old' idea of 'Europe' and its unilinear progressive history are used in contemporary politics and history for promoting the 'European identity' and for facilitating European integration processes.

### 1.1 'Orientalizing' the Orient<sup>1</sup>

Orient has been Europe's historical 'other', and its oldest colony. Initially, European intellectuals started studying the Orient for the purpose of getting to know the

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<sup>1</sup> The term is borrowed from E. Said 'Orientalism' (1979).

regions they dominated politically and economically. Later on, in the eighteenth century, orientalism came out as a social discipline, which aimed the scientific study of the societies and cultures of the Orient. European orientalists collected knowledge about their colonies for developing better administrative strategies for the purpose of assuring continuity of their domination over the Orient. However, after the publication of *Orientalism* by Edward Said in 1978, orientalism gained an important and legitimate place in academia as the critique of this particular discourse on the Orient. It became evident that the 'West' and namely 'Europe' was not only studying the Orient, but it was also judging, evaluating and assessing it. From that time on, orientalism as a discipline lost its credibility and gained a negative meaning.

Said systematically examined and then criticized the orientalist discourse for not being objective and for creating stereotypes and prejudices about the Orient. His focus on the Orient's special place in Western experience was based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction created between the Orient and the Occident (Said, 1979: 1-2). The Orient is constructed by the Occident as 'its contrasting image, idea, personality and experience', whereas orientalism is 'the discipline by which the Orient was approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery and practice' (Said, 1979: 73).

Said claimed that because of this distinction between the Orient and the Occident, the Orient was not 'a free-subject of thought or action' since Europe was managing and producing the Orient 'politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period' (1979: 3). What refers to the Orient has different meanings but Said used it basically for the Arab and the Islamic Orient. The dominating 'Europe' was represented by the colonialist empires of France and Britain, which ideologically legitimized their domination by claiming the superior difference of 'Western' civilization over the Orient. All over the world, all Europeans who travelled and those who ruled presented an uncompromising faith in the positive characteristics and values of their civilization, 'in which they maintained to differ from the cultures they encountered and sought to dominate' (Rietbergen, 1998: 411). Europeans considered their

civilization as the best and made their approach clear each time they encountered other cultures and people.

It was the Western Europe, which first discovered the Orient and then manipulated and underplayed it. Not only did the 'West' make the Orient look like the 'other' of 'Europe', but also it represented it in such a way that any way of progression was blocked. Orientalism made impossible the development of studying and knowing the Orient, which would serve for facilitating the affinity of these "opposite" cultures. Despite the de-colonization process Orientalist conceptions still exist and act for the simplest reason that once the 'Orient was Orientalized' the stereotypes and the biases about it would persist for a long time (Said, 1979).

In general while studying the Orient, the orientalist are used to employ the models of their own civilization for the purpose of comparing and contrasting between them, but not only this. The experts on the Orient do not hesitate to criticize, assess and authorize views about the Orient. According to Said, 'Orientalism failed to identify with human experience' and 'failed also to see it as a human experience' (1979: 328). Instead, the Orient merited to be approached more objectively and humanely, rather than merely the 'opposite civilization'.

Generally, the orientalist discourse reinforced the Eurocentric idea that Western civilization is based on rationalism, scientific and technological development, secularization, democracy and modernization principles, whereas the 'East' and the Orient are imagined and referred to as uncivilized, superstitious, despotic and ignorant. By a closer look it can be seen that this is simply a myth constructed on the ground of the ideas of Eurocentrism. The current revisions of Eurocentric history indicate that the mostly European knowledge and the branches of science like philosophy, physics, chemistry, technology, medicine, etc. are derived from non-European sources (Nederveen Pieterse, 1994: 131). Mainly, the numerical system, algebra, astronomy and architecture were born in non-European terrain and until the fourteenth century Europe was primarily a recipient of science and technology (Nederveen Pieterse, 1994: 131). Consequently, more than being in opposition to

each other, the 'East' and the Orient have a relationship based on cultural and social exchange. If orientalism is about the distinction between 'Western superiority and Oriental inferiority' then it should be prepared to see 'how in its development and subsequent history Orientalism deepened and even hardened the distinction' (Said, 1979: 42). In his orientalism Said did not necessarily try to challenge the divisions in the world like that of East/West or Orient/Occident but, he insisted on challenging orientalism 'as a Western style of dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient' (1979: 3).

The orientalist discourse used to represent the 'West' as dynamic and as evolving in geographical, political and cultural aspects, whereas the Orient and the 'Eastern history' were always referred to as stagnant, non-progressing and non-evolving. The orientalists became inspired from today's reflections of the 'West' and see its image in each historical period of European development (Sulstarova, 2002b: 261). The chronology of the idea of the 'West' is presented 'as old as the Greeks' and as taking place in all stages of development of Western civilization (Davies, 1996: 22). Consequently, the orientalists wrote about the 'West' and 'Western identity' in the past European history when actually such an entity and identity did not exist. As GoGwilt rightfully claimed, it is only 'between the 1880s and the 1920s that 'the West' entered the English language as a term linking a contemporary political bloc, a discrete historical development' and a lived sense of cultural identity (GoGwilt, 1995: 37).

Another aspect of the orientalist discourse is related with the identification of the 'East' and the Oriental cultures with religion, mainly with Islam. Indeed sometimes these cultures are reduced to Islam whereas the 'West' is never reduced to Christianity, but it is dressed on modernity and developmental colours. For that reason, it creates the sense that the 'West' in many cases is not compared to the Orient, but to Islam itself. An illustration of this can be provided from an official talk of the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, who little after the September 11, terrorist attacks in Washington, declared that, 'the West stays above Islam' (see

Sulstarova, 2002: 259). This is a clear sign of the Western reduction of the Orient to the Islam. Said asserts that,

...whereas 'the West' is greater than and has surpassed the stage of Christianity, its principal religion, the world of Islam-its varied societies, histories, and languages notwithstanding-is still mired in religion, primitivity, and backwardness. Therefore, the West is modern, greater than the sum of its parts, full of enriching contradictions and yet always 'Western' in its cultural identity; the world of Islam, on the other, is no more than 'Islam,' reducible to a small number of unchanging characteristics despite the appearance of contradictions and experiences of variety that seem on the surface to be as plentiful as those of the West (Said, 1981: 10).

All in all, it is generally accepted that orientalism is more about the 'West' than it is about the Orient since it tells more about Eurocentrism and the way 'Europe' views its 'others' than it objectively describes the Orient or the oriental cultures.

#### 1.2. The Eastern Europe as the 'other' within

In the last decades historians as well as literacy critics studied extensively the way in which the 'Westerns' historically imagined the Eastern Europe. Resembling orientalism and many times being entangled with it, the idea of Eastern Europe is established differently from that of the Orient. That the Eastern Europe is envisaged as the 'other' of 'Europe' there is no doubt. However, it represents an ambiguous 'other' located between Europe and Asia in all senses. While 'Europe' and the 'West' were created in opposition to the Oriental Asia and the Islam, the Eastern Europe is a later invention developed as a complementary part of 'Europe', as the uncivilized part of it. Although it did not become a formal political and ideological entity until the Yalta and Postdam agreements of 1945, the idea of Eastern Europe is much older than communism itself (Bideleux & Jeffries, 1998: 15).

L. Wolff reveals that 'it was the Western Europe that invented Eastern Europe as its complementary other half in the eighteenth century, the age of Enlightenment' (1994: 4). At this particular historical period intellectuals and philosophers of

Western Europe redrew the mental mapping of 'Europe' divided between the 'West' and the 'East'. The borders of this post-enlightenment mapping would coincide two centuries later with the iron curtain line. As Wolff notes, 'European polarization of the Renaissance between the Italian city-states and the northern barbarians, in the eighteenth century survived only in a rhetorical form' as it was shifted to East-West polarization of Europe (1994: 5).

The West-East perspective on the continent elaborated by the philosophers of the eighteenth century at the age of Enlightenment substituted the old South-North orientation of Europe dominating at the age of Renaissance. This conceptual reorientation of Europe through West-East axis created by the Enlightenment philosophies coincides with the East-West division existing in the contemporary Europe. 'Just as the new centers of the Enlightenment superseded the old centers of the Renaissance, the old lands of barbarism and backwardness in the north were correspondingly displaced to the east' (Wolff, 1994: 5). Together with this, Europe's centre of culture and economy shifted from Rome, Florence, and Venice to more internationally important cities like Paris, London and Amsterdam. The category of the so-called "barbarians" of the north, pointing Sweden, Denmark, Poland and Russia, in the Enlightenment reorientation shifted to the east, referring to the Eastern Europe and further, but still including Poland and Russia. These countries associated with Hungary, Bohemia and the Balkans in general emerged under the heading of Eastern Europe. 'The Enlightenment had to invent Western Europe and Eastern Europe together, as complementary concepts, defining each other by opposition and adjacency' (Wolff, 1994: 5). The reorientation of Europe's mental mapping that emerged in the eighteenth century was based on the building associations and comparison between the lands of Europe. Even though showing internal disparities, the lands of Eastern Europe were associated and linked together in order to form a single entity. Next, they were compared with the Western Europe, which served both as a point of reference and a point of criticisms. Consequently, the whole picture of Europe was reframed with the invention of Europe along east-west axis.



Like orientalism, the study of Eastern Europe was 'a style of intellectual mastery, integrating knowledge and power' which as in the case of the Orient was very tied with real conquest (Wolff, 1994: 8). The study and the invention of Eastern Europe were enhanced at the historical period of French invasion of Russia, thus, at the time when Western European armies established an empire on Eastern Europe. It was the time when the utterly unknown East European lands were explored by the 'Western' travellers whose images and impressions of this region became the basis of stigmatizing the 'Eastern Europe'.

The Enlightenment philosophers and travellers on the way to Istanbul and to St. Petersburg, within which extremities laid the unexplored Eastern Europe, discovered the Eastern Europe intellectually. Istanbul and St. Petersburg were referred to as 'great destinations, the capital of the Orient and the capital of the North' (Wolff, 1994: 22). This indicated that Ottoman lands were perceived as 'oriental' and they were pushed to the further east and were excluded from the Eastern Europe idea. As Wolff elegantly notes, Eastern Europe was constructed within simultaneous politics of inclusion and exclusion, 'Europe but not Europe' (1994: 7). Eastern Europe was created for mediating between 'Europe' and the Orient, despotism and civilization. For this reason, according to Wolff, 'one might describe the invention of Eastern Europe as an intellectual project of demi-Orientalization' (1994: 7). Eastern Europe was demi-orientalized since it was a geographical and political space mediating between the two opposite civilizations. Eastern Europe was not located on 'the antipode of the civilization, not down in the depth of barbarism' but it was rather located 'on the developmental scale that measures the distance between civilization and barbarism' (Wolff, 1994:13). The idea of Eastern Europe emerged inside an intermediary cultural space between the opposition of European civilization and Asian barbarism at equal proximity to both.

What links the demi-oriental project of Eastern Europe with Said's *Orientalism* despite of being an 'other' to Europe, is that they both developed in a secular context at the age of Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was the period of the rise of rationalism, science and philosophy; and in this context both the Orthodox Eastern

Europe and the Islamic Orient were seen as antagonist entities to the West. Simultaneously, as in the case of the Orient, the semi-colonial relations of Eastern Europe with 'Europe' and its relative economic backwardness reinforced the position of Eastern Europe as non-Europe. Indeed, the economic, technological and cultural 'retardation' of East Central Europe relative to north-western Europe placed the former in a subordinate, inferior and semi-colonial role *vis-à-vis* the latter during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (Bideleux & Jeffries, 1998: 280).

It is generally agreed that the 'East' and the 'West' are relative concepts and there is no such a thing like 'the true West' or 'the true East'. Likewise, neither Eastern nor Western Europe are single homogeneous entities, but they both continue to be presented as such. Undeniably, different parts of the east of Europe at particular times have not been economically weaker than the Western European countries. The criterion, according to which the Eastern Europe was classified as inferior *vis-à-vis* the 'West' in the early eighteenth century, was mainly economic, since 'European' travellers became very disappointed when they saw the poverty in Eastern Europe. As Bideleux and Jeffries argue, since the sixteenth century onwards the Eastern Europe has been incorporated into a peripheral and dependent role in the capitalist world economy whose centre was located in northwestern Europe (1998: 21). As the east of 'Europe' was standing beyond Europe primarily in terms of economic level 'it came to be identified more often with industrial backwardness, lack of advanced social relations and institutions typical for the developed capitalist West, irrational and superstitious cultures unmarked by Western Enlightenment' (Todorova, 1997:11). However, the issue of Eastern European backwardness was not essentially economic but it was its ambiguous location, within Europe and at the same time not fully European 'that called for such notions as backwardness and development to mediate between the poles of civilization and barbarism' (Wolff, 1994: 9).

The identification of Eastern Europe as an economic periphery was done in the minds of eighteenth century philosophers who associated the economic model of Eastern Europe with 'European' economic structures of early centuries. The issues of backwardness and development in Eastern Europe, which were elaborated and

designated in the eighteenth century 'not essentially as economic issues', continue framing 'our conception of these lands' (Wolff, 1994: 9). To a larger extent, it was Eastern Europe's ambiguous geographical coverage, inside Europe but not fully European, 'that called for such notions as backwardness and development to mediate between the poles of civilization and barbarism' (Wolff, 1994: 9). Thus, the discovery of Eastern Europe by the 'Europe' was based mostly in the location of Eastern Europe and later it was stigmatized with respect to economic, cultural and political development. Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century provided the very first model of underdevelopment to Western Europe (Wolff, 1994: 9). As a result it can be concluded that symbolic geopolitics framed Eastern Europe as integral to Europe, yet culturally different, constituting Europe's 'other' within.

### 1.3. Balkans: The dark side of Europe

Recently inspired by the contemporary politics and the readings of Said's *Orientalism* the scholars studying Balkans have enhanced their efforts on uncovering the West's misrepresentations of the Balkans and on differentiating Balkanism from orientalism. Geographically, the Balkans cover the southeastern peninsula of Europe which name was gained during the late period of Ottoman Empire's rule in the region. Until recently not only the word 'Balkans' was not used, but also no single geographical notion was applied to the territory we now call the Balkan peninsula (Hall & Danta, 1996: 4). The travellers of the eighteenth century began using the notion 'Balkans' as a synonym for the mountain Haemus that divides Bulgaria from the east to the west and runs parallel to the Danube (Todorova, 1997: 22, 25). Progressing in time the unknown lands of the peninsula were dressed by the most pejorative designation of European history. The emerging new nations of Balkans, which in late Roman and medieval times were among the most 'civilized' and economically developed lands of Europe, in the late nineteenth century became among the most turbulent, conflict prone and least developed countries in Europe (Bideleux & Jeffries, 1998: 37). The Ottoman legacy, violent nationalisms, and continuous ethnic tensions are generally perceived as the most prominent element for assigning the negative meaning to the Balkans. Hall and Danta explain that,

It was in the Balkans where the first European civilization arose; where Pericles walked and Olympian gods played out their intrigues; where science, the arts and democracy flourished. Elitist European visitors who came here in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries expecting to find a continuation of classical heritage were sorely disappointed (1996: 7).

The Balkans like the Eastern Europe were unknown lands among the westerns. European travellers discovered them geographically, socially and culturally only from the late eighteenth century onwards with the preceding idea that the Balkans had a distinct physiognomy of their own which deserved particular attention apart from being treated merely as provinces of Ottoman Empire (Todorova, 1997: 62). Despite this, until the twentieth century no common stereotype about the Balkans existed in the 'West' (Todorova, 1997: 115).

Maria Todorova in her 'Imagining the Balkans' explains the formation of the Balkanism as a Western cultural discourse on the Balkans and strictly criticizes it. According to her, the Balkans were shaped by two prominent historical legacies. The first is the period of Byzantium with its prominent political, legal, religious and cultural impact whereas the second consists of the half millennium of Ottoman rule during which the peninsula acquired its name-Balkans- and experienced the longest period of political unity in its history (Todorova, 1997: 12). As is suggested, most of the stereotypes and stigmas about the Balkans are invoked from Ottoman elements. This is because the Ottoman Empire had a long presence from fourteenth to early twentieth centuries in the peninsula and undoubtedly the Ottoman elements were traced in all spheres of politico-economic and social life. The South-Eastern Europe became 'Balkanized' under the Ottoman rule which destroyed the larger units represented by the former states of southeastern Europe and in their place created 'a multitude of theoretically self-contained units which were small enough to be powerless but large enough to be functionally useful' (quoted in Bideleux & Jeffries, 1998: 39).

With the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the attempts on the formation of modern nation-states as the ones in the 'West', the ethnic conflicts led to the

beginning of the Balkan wars. The Balkans were also held responsible for the assassination of Austria-Hungary's emperor's heir Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, an event which triggered the World War I. This enhanced the Balkan people's image as war makers and quarrelsome. Consequently, in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries the geographic discovery of the Balkans was going parallel to the invention of the region as turbulent and worrisome. The Balkans became known for their violence, 'the cult of the gun' and their hobby: 'assassinating kings and having revolutions' (Todorova, 1997: 122, 127). Together with the inherent images of violence, the Balkans in the early twentieth century were described in the 'West' as primitive races and barbarians. 'It was always with reference to the East that the Balkan cruelty was explained' (Todorova, 1997: 118). Comparisons with the 'East' led to the attribution of an oriental character and culture to this region. The 'Balkan' category of generalizations while overlapping with 'Oriental' had additional characteristics like cruelty, instability and unpredictability. The southeastern Europe, which was in many respect the cradle of European civilization, became 'Balkanized', 'a byword for cruelty, debilitating fragmentation, inter-ethnic conflict, underdevelopment and loss of political and economic autonomy' (Bideleux & Jeffries, 1998:2).

Todorova attacks the Balkan intellectuals who find the notion of orientalism attractive and who attempt to use it for explaining the Western perceptions and stigmas for the Balkans. Todorova suggests the term 'Balkanism' for describing the relationship between the Balkans and the 'Europe', and she insists at differentiating this discourse from orientalism. Balkanism is a specific discourse gradually constituted 'in the course of last two centuries and crystallized around the Balkan wars and World War I' (Todorova, 1997: 19). Todorova maintains that 'Balkanism evolved to a great extent independently from orientalism and, in certain aspects against or despite it' (1997: 20). One distinction between the Balkans and the Orient lies in the fact that the latter was a colony of Europe whereas the former is not. According to Todorova, despite their peripheral and provincial place in the history, the Balkans are geographically in Europe, therefore they cannot be called colonial

(1997). The Balkans do not share any colonial character that is why they have been suspended from orientalism (Todorova, 1997:16-17).

The Balkans share a weaker sense of being colonial than the Orient does (Todorova, 1997). The 'sensitivity of victimization' and the tendency to blame the great powers are less acute in the Balkans. These represent 'a consciousness of a certain degree of autonomy' (Todorova, 1997: 17). Thus, both the perception and self-perception of the Balkans with respect to the colonial dimension indicate that pushing the Balkans in the 'semicolonial' category is out of place. The fact that the Balkans have been under the rule of 'European' and Eastern Empires indicate their transitory character, not their colonial character (Todorova, 1997: 17). Furthermore, the Balkans within the difficult history of the 'East' are strategically distinguished from the Near and the Middle East and this makes the application of orientalism in the Balkans nonsense (Todorova, 1997: 20). Another fact which divides Balkanism from orientalism is that while the orient is a large and ill-defined region, the 'Balkans have a concrete historical existence' (Todorova, 1997: 12).

Balkans likewise the Eastern Europe, have been compared to a bridge and a crossroad between East and West (Todorova, 1997: 16). In another sense, the peninsula is also considered as a bridge between stages of development, which invokes labels such as 'semideveloped, semicolonial, semicivilized, semioriental' (Todorova, 1997:16). Parallel to the idea of Eastern Europe, Balkanism also is constructed in an ambiguous location and geographical coverage. Unlike the orientalism, 'which is a discourse about an imputed opposition' Balkanism is about 'imputed ambiguity' (Todorova, 1997: 17).

A process of simultaneous geographical discovery and intellectual invention created Balkanism as a discourse of 'Europe' and 'the West'. Overgeneralizations like reducing the Balkan history to the Serbian history has led to the creation of the false image of Balkans as a single entity. As Todorova suggests, it would be better if the Yugoslavian war stop being presented as Balkan war and instead start being explained with 'Western' terms like citizenship, minority rights, and problems of

ethnic and religious autonomy (1997: 186). Because of the wars in Yugoslavia, in the 1990s there was a tendency in Western Europe to accept the Central European nations as being candidly European, and to keep the Balkans out of Europe (Detrez, 2003: 91). It is generally suggested that the West should stop viewing the Balkans only in time of crisis and forget them during peace. Also, as generally accepted, the West should stop considering the history of the Balkans only in terms of the Ottoman rule, where the latter is still represented as an Oriental culture and as the opposite of the 'Western civilization' instead of being considered in its own terms. As Bideleux and Jeffries argue, generally it is believed that the Balkans became perceived as the most backward region of Europe as a result of the long Turkish domination (1998: 39).

While the Eastern Europe was reconstructed between ambiguous politics of inclusion and exclusion, the Balkans seem to be less lucky. By being geographically inside Europe, and yet culturally constructed as the darkest side of it, a significant 'number of externalized political, ideological, and cultural frustrations stemming from tensions and contradictions inherent to the region' has been attributed to the Balkans (Todorova, 1997: 188). Looked from another angle, Balkanism, the Western discourse on the Balkans, emerged not only a subtype of orientalism, but it became a substitute for the emotional discharge that orientalism provided. Balkanism exempted the West 'from charges of racism, colonialism, eurocentrism, and Christian intolerance against Islam' (Todorova, 1997: 188). According to Todorova the Balkans were analyzed through the framework of 'Balkanism', which, despite its link with orientalism, is a special discourse. Indeed, the prominence of Balkanism is that its stereotypes and stigmas about the peninsula are believed to leave the Balkan countries at the waiting room of EU for an unpredictable time period. They are not accepted in EU because of their alleged lack of Europeanness (Detrez, 2003: 91).

#### 1.4. The Case of Albania

Affected by the ideas of orientalism and designed for explaining the 'claimed peripherality' of the country in Europe's politico-economic system, Albania in many

cases has been referred as 'Oriental' not only by foreign thinkers and scholars but also by some national intellectuals as well. With the re-establishment of religious practice in post-communist era and inspired by the foreign media which exhibited no hesitation at reporting Albania as an Islamic country and an underdeveloped one lacking political stability, the artificial dilemma of 'whether going East or West' has been displayed in some national political circles. This happened despite the fact that such a dilemma was never present in the Albanian politics, given that all the post-communist governments expressed their clear aspirations of joining Europe, namely the 'West'. This phenomenon elicited new interest on searching on Albanian history and its relations with the 'East' and 'West'.

During the period of transition to democracy some pragmatic intellectuals, demoralized by the fact that Albania was showing little economic progress and inspired by the past history constituted by five centuries of Ottoman rule and almost fifty years of communism, began claiming that like other times in history, Albania was situated in front of an option of choosing among the 'East' and 'West'. These intellectuals began asking whether Albania did actually become an 'Eastern' country during these 'Eastern' experiences, or it has been 'Eastern' in its origin since the antiquity. A well-known Albanian writer, Mustafa Nano in his essay 'Europe: Destination X' argues:

When one thinks that Albania is geographically in the East, it is an ex-communist country, it is in the Balkans, and is predominantly a Muslim country and a poor one, the courage to disparage the East and to exclude oneself from it seems to be a nonsense nationalist's swell which in order to survive use their past history for boasting with the ancient Albania, which was thought to be Christian like the other countries, not barbarian like the Slavs and not poorer than its friends (Nano, 2002: 7).

According to Nano, the fact that the meaning of Albanian anti-communist revolution emerged in the easily-articulated motto 'We want Albania as the rest of Europe', pointed to the Albanian consciousness of being a poor and backward country, namely 'Eastern'. Because of this, Albanians were thought to rely on Europe for escaping from the identification with their unfortunate destiny (Nano, 2002: 5-7). In this light,



Albania was imagined as solely trying to depart from the undesired situation by decisively choosing to develop along the Western lines. Nano also explains that, since the Albanians could not find traces of Europeanness in their contemporary modern history, they fell back to their pre-Ottoman past, where actually they could not find traces of Europeanness, but created them (Nano, 2002: 7). According to the author, the entire history of modern Albania was accompanied by attempts for identifying with the West, which were consolidated by the promulgation of the Albanian alphabet based on the Latin letters in 1908 (Nano, 2002: 7). Albanian intellectuals like Nano demonstrate the tendency of linking all the social, political and economic problems Albania is facing in the post-90s to the weak consciousness of national identity, and the attempts at linking Albanian history with that of the 'West'. Throughout the essay, it seems as, if Albanians would accept their 'Eastern' origin, all their problems would be solved.

'Our way of perceiving or imagining a person, a community or a country may deeply influence our disposition towards them and consequently our way of dealing with them' (Detrez, 2003: 90). Certainly, the Western perceptions on Albania are not distinguished from the perceptions on the Balkans in general, in which images of otherness were reinforced by the mid-1990s conflicts of Yugoslavia. 'Located on the south eastern edge of Europe, the marginality of Albania's geographical location is reinforced by Western perceptions of the country's spatial, cultural and political peripherality' (Hall, 2001: 107).

The ones who describe Albanian culture as 'oriental', are mainly inspired by the five-hundred-years old Ottoman rule in the country. The Turkish regional presence underlies the perception on 'an enforced backwardness and cultural hostility which precludes access to the agrarian and industrial revolutions of the West' (Hall, 2001: 108). As Turkey has been undeservedly used to refer the 'East' and the gates to the Orient, these images have also been used for describing Albania and the Balkans in general. Albania is represented by the orientalist as detached from Europe because of the Turkish invasion at the time when in the 'Western Europe' the principal institutions of the contemporary European civilization, were founded. At this time,

for West Europeans Albania merely marked the gate to the Orient, a mysterious, exotic and terrifying location, which is today known as the Near East (Misha, 1997: 30).

Albanian orientalists like Aurel Plasari and Piro Misha discuss the Albanian history in the framework of East-West divide and highlight the pre-Ottoman past as its highest moment (Sulstarova, 2002b). According to these orientalists, the Ottoman domination is a turning point in the Albanian history because it detached Albanians from the West and put them for centuries in oppression and darkness.

Plasari seeks the roots of the post-communist Albanian problems to the East-West divide. According to the author, the fact that the transition to democracy was occurring in two different rhythms across the Eastern and Central Europe stemmed from the reality that the countries successful at the democratic transition in their past history were under the domination of Latin and Germanic Empires, whereas the less successful countries like the Balkans, experienced Orthodox and Islamic domination (Plasari, 1992: 16). Sulstarova, who studied and criticized the use of orientalism in Albanian context, claims that the dilemma of 'whether going East or West' does not exist, since Albanians have no other choice rather than developing along Western lines. (Sulstarova, 2002b: 270-1). This is due to Albania's geographic location that is situated at the crossing point of different civilizations, and does not constitute any impediment for the future integration of Albanian in Europe (Sulstarova, 2002b: 271).

When Albania is referred to as an 'Eastern' country, there is strong reference to religion. Historically speaking, after the Ottoman occupation in the fifteenth century, the *millet* system was introduced in the whole Balkans. Unlike the Serbs, the Albanians, because of the lack of a central religious authority, were unable to enjoy the benefits offered by the Ottoman system (Kola, 2003: 6). This created the vulnerability of Albanians to convert to Islam mainly for tax advantages or for means of advancement within the empire. The image of Albania as Islamic has been in many cases used against the country by the neighbouring countries, however, for

'Albanians, religion was actually subordinated to interests of nationalism during the period of national revival in the late nineteenth century and in the subsequent establishment of an Albanian state' (Hall, 2001: 108). Indeed, Albanians are not only Islamic, but they are people of three religions: Catholic, Orthodox and Islam.

Yet, the last two religions came later in history since the Albanians for more than a thousand of years have been homogeneously Roman Catholics. Still, in Albania discussing religious issues is sometimes an avoided issue whereas giving percentages on religion faiths is notably suggested to be dangerous. A. Plasari maintains that, when one makes percentages and reconstructs the history of 'Albanian Islamism', we should foresee that the neighbouring countries can use these arguments against our nation, as they did in the past (1992: 57).

Albanians in many cases are represented in the West as backward and primitive people, but not as superstitious, "barbarian", despotic and ignorant, elements in which the West dressed the Orient and the Oriental culture. Todorova argues that 'whether the Balkans are non-European or not is mostly a matter of academic and political debate, but they certainly have no monopoly over barbarity' (1997: 7). Together with this, Albania and the Balkans in general, are never seen as the opposite of European civilization. The in-betweenness and transitory character of the Balkans 'could have made them simply as incomplete other; instead they are constructed not as other but as incomplete self' (Todorova, 1997:18). As Detrez maintains, identifying the Albanian culture with oriental images is without place since Albania belongs geographically and historically to Europe (Detrez, 2003). From this perspective it can be argued that the country has participated and contributed to the development and establishment of European civilization throughout its history. The city of Durrës, which in antiquity was one of the main harbors of the Roman Empire, located on the *Via Egnatia*, was one of the main roads of the Roman Empire, linking Rome with Istanbul (Detrez, 2003: 93). The archeological excavations of this city indicate that it used to be a prominent center of Greek and Roman civilization. As is claimed, these and other historical events indicate that Albania because of its geographic position has been perpetually exposed

to European developments, and because of its place to the European civilization, it cannot be compared to that of the Orient. Such an interpretation of the Albanian history may be taken as a reflection of the recent Europe-oriented identity politics and discourses that are observed in the Central and Eastern Europe from the end of 80's onwards.

If we were to analyze the concept of what Wolff called demi-orientalism in Albanian context it can be argued that Albania in the eighteenth century did not look better than the other countries of the Eastern Europe. Albania was vaguely known among the Western Europeans until the Enlightenment era. It was economically backward, primitive and still there were no attempts for creating an independent Albanian nation state. Moreover, like the Eastern Europe it carried images of a mediating land between Europe and Asia. Albania, the 'twilight zone' is historically created as an in-between land where two worlds are divided and united, where historically different religions, cultures and civilizations, mostly hostile, confronted each other (Misha, 1997: 10-12). However, Albania more than a mediating country between East and West is seen as the place where these relatively different cultures met each other for centuries. What makes Albania look like the other countries of the Eastern Europe is the communism regime that endured for more than forty years. Despite the ideology, the self-imposed isolation brought significant economic and technological impediments, which pushed Albania into social and financial aridness. The economic impoverishment and the location of Albania to the east of the iron curtain during the Cold War legitimize its 'otherness' in the eyes of the Westerns.

Since Albania is geographically located in the Balkan Peninsula, despite the fact it did not take place in the inter-ethnic conflicts that gave the Balkans the negative portrayal, in the post-communist period the country was viewed within a Balkan context. Its five-century old Ottoman legacy, its relatively late emergence of nation formation movements, the political instability in post-1991 and its inclusion to the European Union's initiative for Western Balkans, reinforce the image of Albania as a 'Balkan' country. As Detrez explains, because of carelessness and ignorance, the Yugoslavian wars were frequently called 'Balkan wars' mainly by politicians and

journalists as if all the Balkans were involved in them (2003:91). Consequently, not only Yugoslavia but the entire region got stigmatized and it was denied the right to be called 'European', which implied that the doors of the European institutions and particularly to EU remained closed for the time being (Detrez, 2003: 91).

Hence, as the history is perceived and experienced differently by different countries, it is inappropriate making judgments and evaluations based on the ideas of Eurocentrism, as the West European of the last centuries actually did. This is because the knowledge obtained can be erroneous and it can impede objectivity. The divisions of 'East' and 'West', which hinder the realization of the aim of academic research and lead to 'biased' knowledge, are generally accepted to originate from simplistic thinking and Western overgeneralizations about other regions. However, the implication of such a mental mapping of Europe as divided between 'East' and 'West' has a great impact in the way 'Western' imagination perceive and deal with the others, since once established in the minds of people, these categories become very robust and resistant to change.

In the following chapter the post-communist political, economic and mainly cultural transition of the East Central Europe, which provides a general framework of the post cold transformations of the Eastern Europe, is elaborated. The successful presentation of the countries of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia as the 'Central Europe', which returned into a successful political discourse recognized in the West, dictating the inclusion of these countries into European Union, is discussed. In addition, it is shown that the EU decision about the eastern enlargement was mainly affected by the discourse of this invented region on its place in Europe.

## CHAPTER 2

### POST-COMMUNIST TRANSFORMATIONS IN EASTERN AND CENTRAL EUROPE

The sudden fall of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe within 1989-1991 time period found the Western Europe unprepared to deal with the radical political changes. The collective conscience of the Western Europe was based on the records of post-1945 when, while the Western Europe was experiencing economic bloom and prosperity, the Eastern and Central Europe suffered under the communist regimes. For the West, communism was an incomprehensible remote reality, lying behind the iron curtain. However, this kind of short-sightedness was not shared by the citizens of Central and Eastern Europe, who could not imagine that the Yalta division of the continent was 'a normal condition' for Europe (Mayhew, 1998: 3).

The demise of communism marked definitely the end of the Cold War and the beginning of post-communist era for European and world politics. The geopolitical boundary, which used to determine the borders of 'Europe' and to describe the nature of the relations between 'East' and 'West', lost its permanent significance and became permeable. The transformation of the world order preceded great transformations in political, social, economic and cultural spheres of the Central and Eastern Europe, which by now became effective in the redesignation of the political and cultural geography of Europe. However, the post-communist transformation could not immediately succeed on removing the former organization of the geopolitical and cultural mapping of Europe based on the two homogeneous antagonist entities of 'East' and 'West' created in centuries. By contrast, the fact that the ongoing processes of European enlargement and integration spent a lot of efforts on redrawing the cultural boundary with the 'other' Europe rather than searching for affinity indicates that the divisions of the 'East' and the 'West' are preserved. As M. Smith reveals, with the end of the Cold War 'the cultural boundary, which

had been in a sense subsumed by the geopolitical realities of the situation, became a significant independent factor' (1996: 21). The potential power of the 'culture' element to draw the broad lines of the future socio-political development are noted also by S.P. Huntington who suggests that 'in the post-Cold War world, the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political or economic but they are cultural' (1996: 21). In this sense, despite the great efforts of the 'East Europe' to implement liberal political and economic reforms an endeavor 'to redefine the geopolitical frontier in terms of economic and societal values has been very strong' (Smith, 1996: 21). This indicates that the image of the 'East' was embodied so deep in the conscience of Western Europe so that even the end of Cold War did not mean the end of the East-West division for the Westerners.

Among the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe, especially three countries of the region, namely Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia played a prominent role in the creation of a post-communist transition culture. Not only they became the front-runners of anti-communist movements, but also they happened to be the most successful countries at implementing political, economic, and particularly cultural policies, which paved their way to Europe. Because of these reasons European enlargement process itself was initiated for privileging this region, which claimed to be a part of Western civilization.

### 2.1. The Rediscovery of Central Europe

The Eastern and Central Europe entered an epoch of great transformation, referred in the academic literature as the 'triple transition' including political, economic and social change. Especially one region lately known as the 'Central Europe' became the front runner of anti-communist popular movement against the old authoritarian regimes, and the first to pass to the stage of the democratic transition. These countries of Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia are also known by the terms 'the lands in between' or 'shatter zones'<sup>2</sup> or are referred to as being located between Germany and Russia, between Europe and Asia, or East and West. As Batt reveals,

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<sup>2</sup> The term is used by Bugge (2002).

this indeterminate location of Central Europe 'has had a fundamental impact on the shaping of political identities throughout the region' (2003: 9). Historically these countries spent many efforts on catching up with the West. Since the sixteenth century 'Central Europe' took place at the semi-periphery of the modern world system, moving between 'long periods of Europeanization and de-Europeanization, the last period of which was the Sovietization' (Ágh, 1998a: 33). The relatively long lasting period of the communism that was considered as a period of Easternization was succeeded by a period of Westernization that is democratization. Yet, by the 1989 in East Central Europe (ECE) democracy was 'universally equated with the dismantling of an externally imposed system of communist rule based philosophically on the suppression of private property' (Whitehead, 1997: 31).

G. Pridham notes that since the beginning of the transition era, in the Eastern Central European countries, a splendid commitment for making the new democratic politics work has been noticed at both elite and public level, to a degree not present in other post-communist countries (Pridham, 2001a: 12). In the democratization process the East Central Europe had also the advantage of starting the socio-economic modernization at a better point than the other countries of Eastern Europe, namely the Balkans, which had little pre-war democratic transition. These elements distinguished East Central Europe from the other countries and created a legitimate framework for its goal of 'joining Europe' and becoming like 'Europe'. On the contrary, in the Balkans the main motivation towards Europe was mainly inspired by a desire to escape from the Balkans (Pridham, 2001a: 13). These factors provided that the East Central Europe enter the era of post-communist history and politics as a distinct, and somehow homogeneous, region. As it could be easily differentiated from other areas of Europe, East Central Europe began enjoying at the same time a sense of its own identity (Pridham, 2001a: 13).

All of the post-communist governments of ECE countries attached a great significance to the so-called 'return to Europe'; the slogan that best encapsulated the meaning of the 1989-1991 revolutions of Central and Eastern Europe. This slogan contained a wide spectrum of aspirations consisting on a rapid entry into European



Union; an adaptation of Western-style laws and institutions; free travel and migration, free market economy systems; and many other cultural, economic and geopolitical reorientations (Bideleux & Jeffries, 1998: 620). At the same time the slogan expresses the internalization of the 'East' category by the East Central Europeans from which they tried to escape. Indeed, the communist regime was perceived as a characteristic of 'East Europe', and not as an ideology or an alternative state organization. The communism started being accepted by the Eastern Europe itself as a kind of Eastern civilization.

The people of the so-called Central Europe in all ways escaped from their identification as Eastern Europe and began promoting their Central European identity as an inseparable part of the Western European identity. As Bugge reveals, since the 1930s Polish historians like Halecki and Handelsman had expressed their aim of escaping the automatic identification of Eastern Europe with the Slavic identity and had tried to present the East European history as an integral part of universal European history (2002: 54). Other historians of interwar period had also culturally related the Czechs, the Poles and other non-orthodox Slavs to the Western Europe, still describing Czechoslovakia as geographically belonging to Central Europe, the area between Russia and Western Europe (Bugge, 2002: 55).

The initial records of the cultural and political movement of 'return to Europe' were seen through the 1980s when many intellectuals of the so called 'lands in-between' frustrated under the Russian hegemony tried to link their region geographically and historically with Europe and the 'West'. An influential region-building essay written by Milan Kundera in 1983 (and 1984) entitled 'The Tragedy of Central Europe' became the fuel of the intellectual and cultural movement on 'Central Europe'. According to Kundera the tragedy of Central Europe lied in the fact that it was 'culturally in the West and politically in the East' (1984: 33). Kundera highlighted that, despite of the imposed communist rule, people of Central Europe had always been European with respect to their cultural identities. The author denoted that the communism was unable to separate Western and Central Europe from each other

since the common culture united them more than the political ideology divided them. Kundera puts the meaning of Europe for the people of 'Central Europe' this way:

For a thousand years their nations have belonged to the part of Europe rooted in Roman Christianity. They have participated in every period of its history. For them, the word 'Europe' does not represent a phenomenon of geography but a spiritual notion synonymous with the word 'West'. The moment Hungary is no longer European - that is, no longer Western - it is driven from its own destiny, beyond its own history; it loses the essence of its identity (Kundera, 1984: 33).

Half and a decade later, regarding the same issue, Adam Michnik, a Polish dissident who was a part of Solidarity team during the Roundtable negotiations, claimed that, Europe for people like him meant freedom, normalcy and economic rationality. 'Europe was a light on the western horizon, a hope that our country, too, might one day become free' (Michnik, 2003: 128).

Throughout his essay, Kundera championed the Central Europe's cultural and religious affinity to Europe. As is generally known, in the past, Europe was divided into two parts; the Western Europe that was related to ancient Rome, and the Catholic Church and the Eastern Europe linked to the Orthodox Church. According to Kundera the catastrophe of Central Europe was that after the Second World War the borders between the two, had shifted several kilometers to the West and 'several nations that had always considered themselves to be Western woke up to discover that they were now in the East' (1984: 33).

Kundera's essay, which was tailor-made for Western consumption, among other things had two clear goals: first, associating Central Europe to the 'West' and the 'Europe' and second, detaching Central Europe from Russia, the Soviet Union and communist regimes. In this sense the communist system, although being an ideological regime was envisaged by Kundera and other intellectuals and dissidents participating in the discourse of East Central Europe as a process of Easternization, de-Europeanization and as a mark of 'East' civilization. One and a half decade later Judt wrote:

The Czech Republic, under the presidency of Vaclav Havel, is enthusiastically European as the only defense against the demons of its history- most of which consists of being attacked and absorbed by overmighty neighbours, first imperial, then fascist, finally communist. For Czechs then, as for Hungarians and Poles, Europe is not just a place but an ideal of national independence and political and cultural freedom (1998-99: 64).

Kundera demonized the Russians, who he denounced for detaching the Central Europeans from European developments. Not only he represented the Soviet Union as an 'other' political entity, but also, he depicted Russia as an eternal 'other' to European civilization itself. He states that 'on the Eastern border of the West -more than anywhere else- Russia is seen not just as one more European power but as a singular civilization, an *other* civilization' (Kundera, 1984: 34). 'Nothing could be more foreign to Central Europe and its passion for variety than Russia: uniform, standardizing, centralizing- determined to transform every nation of its empire into a single Russian people' (Kundera, 1984:33). In this sense, Kundera represented the Russians as 'demons' and won over them in a cultural battle, which was as important as the ideological one.

Todorova argues that after 1990, the concept of Central Europe created a distinction not only with Russia but also with the other part of the Eastern Europe, namely the Balkans. The Balkans has become a new 'other' to the Central Europe, 'sometimes alongside with, sometimes indistinguishable from' Russia (Todorova, 1997: 160). The struggle of Central Europeans to redefine their place in Europe shaped the following developments of European enlargement and redesigned the cultural mapping of Europe between 'East' and 'West' where Russia was pushed for an indefinite time to the periphery of European civilization. In Neumann's view Russia plays the role of non-European other for the Central Europe boosting of its own Europeanness (Neumann, 1999: 160).

Since the publication of Kundera's prominent essay on the tragedy of Central Europe 'there has been growing insistence on calling the area 'Central' rather than 'Eastern' Europe' (Bideleux & Jeffries, 1998: 9). The collapse of communist regimes in 1989-

91 found the notion of 'Central Europe' established in the daily use in this region and recognized by the 'West'. The participants in the discourse of Central Europe promoted an image of Western Europe as an incomplete entity as long as Central Europe was separated from it in an unnatural way. Moreover, the regional dissidents and intellectuals highlighted that the so-called 'Eastern Europe' was only a political entity whereas their people never shared any sense of 'East Europeanness' or 'East civilization'. The participants in the Central Europe discourse referred to Europe as their cultural homeland to which they naturally belonged. These arguments had a positive effect on Europe's perceiving Central Europe as its integral part. The discourse of Central Europe was very productive since the term became adapted extensively by Western politicians in a very short period (Neumann, 2001b: 66). The proximity to Europe mattered in terms of national image, but more importantly it mattered for the prospect of joining Euro-Atlantic structures and especially, the most prized of these, membership to European Union (Pridham, 2001b: 89).

By the early 1990 the leaders of Central Europe realized that it was the time to convert the cultural discourse of Central Europe to a political project. Neumann quotes the president Havel who in January 1990 expressed that Central Europe was a cultural concept in search of realization when he told the Polish Sejm that:

There is before us the real historic chance to fill with something meaningful the great political vacuum that appeared in Central Europe after the break-up of the Habsburg Empire. We have the chance to transfer Central Europe from a phenomenon that has far been historical and spiritual into a political phenomenon. We have the chance to take a string of European countries that until recently were colonized by the Soviets and that today are attempting the kind of friendship with the nations of the Soviet Union which would be founded on equal rights, and transform them into a definite special body, which would approach Western Europe not as a poor dissident or a helpless, searching amnestied prisoner, but as someone who has something to offer (Neumann, 2001a: 155).

The prominence of the 'rediscovery of Central Europe' lied in the impact it had on the way the region was perceived by the 'West'. The intellectuals and dissidents of the East Central Europe used historical arguments for political purposes by which they described 'Central Europe' in terms of Western European values. The

rediscovery of Central Europe had an impact on the way the history of the region was perceived. The Polish-American historian P. Wandycz claimed that 'Bohemia Hungary and Poland belonged to the Western civilization since these countries had been 'shaped by and experienced all the great historical currents: Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, the French, and Industrial Revolutions'. Adjacent to Russia and the Ottoman domains these countries 'regarded themselves, and were regarded by others, as the bulwark of Christendom' (cited in Bideleux & Jeffries, 1998: 9).

The discourse on Central Europe was 'a moral appeal to Western Europe on behalf of an imagined community born of frustration with the Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe' (Neumann, 1999: 158). 'Central Europe' far from being merely a geographical region, became a spiritual affinity with Europe for the East Central Europeans. This project and its recognition in the West provided incentives for other countries of Eastern Europe to be included in this re-discovered region, that is, Central Europe. Slovenia, Croatia and Romania were the countries that tried most for getting themselves included in the 'Central Europe' and for seeking recognition in the West as European countries. As Neumann notes, 'there is a politically aspiring representation of Central Europe that is entertained by the belt of countries from Estonia in the north to Bulgaria in the south' which claim that the Central Europe includes also these countries along Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia (Neumann, 2001: 150). However, the latter did not recognize the representation of the former. These attempts were made for the reason that the countries of East Central Europe get rid off carrying the burden of 'Eastern Europe' category. In the late 1980s 'the prospect of being recognized first as European and then as a member of the EU has contributed to changing the overall political discourse in applicant countries' (Neumann, 2001: 157).

Naturally, the successful cultural and political representation of Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia as Central Europe exerted pressure on European institutions, mainly European Community for taking the Central Europeans inside. Rupnik claims that, 'from Prague to Budapest, from Cracow to Zagreb, the rediscovery of Central

Europe will remain one of the major intellectual and political developments of 1980s and will no doubt be a vital ingredient in the reshaping of the political map of Europe in the post-Yalta era' (quoted in Bideleux & Jeffries, 1998: 9). Neumann also notes that, with the end of the Cold War one of the starting points of the discourse on EU and NATO enlargement was the necessity of privileging a region, which is now known as 'Central Europe' (1999: 143). This action encouraged the domestic politicians to demand full EU and NATO membership at the first place.

Nevertheless, seen in a broader perspective, the redefinition of the historical frontiers and cultural identities by the East Central Europeans is a comprehensible issue since these countries, whether 'European' or not, share a history squeezed between the traditionally expansionist Germany and Russia. As long as the EC provided security incentives nearby economic and political ones, this region ought not to miss the chance of getting included into Europe.

## 2.2. The Political Impact of the 'Central Europe'

Initially the West European politicians welcomed the emerging democracies of the East Europe and especially in the East Central Europe they promised a rapid integration into European institutions and markets. However, the euphoria of 'a united Europe' that emerged both in the 'East' and 'West Europe' in the 1989 gave way to pessimism in the 1990s 'in spite of an EU enlargement seemingly at last about to materialize' (Bugge, 2002:61). This stemmed from the Community's reluctance at implementing a fast association strategy towards the ECE countries, which were experiencing the most difficult years of the democratic transition. According to Ágh, European pessimism was due to the divergences in mutual expectations of Eastern and Western Europe: while the latter expected quicker and cleaner transformations, the former expected more empathy and assistance (1998a: 8).

Moreover, none in the West could imagine that the communism would capitulate so easily. Mayhew points that only one year before the year of post-communist

revolution, that is 1989, European Council produced a declaration on the role of the EC in the world where the politicians expressed their desire to overcome divisions in the continent. The steps proposed for it were extremely general: developing a Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), promoting disarmament in Europe and respecting human rights (Mayhew, 1998: 13). These indicated that Western Europe was quite unprepared in front of the multi-facet changes in 'Eastern Europe'. It took Europe a considerable period of time for developing a coherent policy towards its newly liberated neighbours meanwhile in the Central and Eastern European societies, the optimism of 'return to Europe' led to widespread pessimism. It was not only due to the persistent images of divisions between the 'East' and the 'West'; but also related to problems of 'popularity deficit, lack of accountability, confidence and legitimation; and identity' that the European Community was facing. (Laffan, 1996). Since the 'Central Europe' idea started being recognized and supported by Western politicians, the idea that the East Central Europe deserved EU and NATO membership at the first place emerged in a short period of time. This idea became so powerful that it concealed the fact that only some years before the countries of 'Central Europe' were with no doubt a part of 'Eastern Europe'.

Not surprisingly, the G7 leaders meeting in Paris in July 1989 took the first steps towards the displacement of the 'East' category. This was done by a declaration where these leaders stated that 'we offer the countries of the East the opportunity to develop balanced economic cooperation on a sound commercial basis consistent with the security interests of each of our countries and with the general principles of international trade' (Mayhew, 1998: 14). Moreover, the signing of bilateral trade agreement of EU with Hungary in September 1988, with Czechoslovakia in December of the same year, and lately with Poland in September 1989 were an indication of EU's increasing commitment to the developments in East Central Europe (Milo, 2002: 167). Even though these agreements were modest in their content and goals, in European academic and political circles rapid rhythms for European affiliation and clear platforms for a gradual integration for reuniting Eastern Europe with the other part of Europe were suggested (Milo, 2002: 167). The political will of Europe for a gradual unification with the ex-communist countries of

Central and Eastern Europe was expressed with maturity in the concrete movement of Western Europe for the democratization and the opening towards a market economy in these countries.

The Paris Summit of G7 leaders among the other things assigned to European Community the duty of coordinating the Western aid for Poland and Hungary. For this purpose the PHARE program (*Pologne-Hongrie assistance à la restructuration des économies*), which began to be implemented in all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, since May 1990 was designed (Milo, 2002: 168). In 1991 European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) was inaugurated. Its role was providing credits for the investments in the East Central Europe, which were done according to the principles of democracy and market economy. The decision of European Council in April 1990 in Dublin for the association agreements served for the development of further affinity between European Community and Eastern and Central European countries. The so-called European Agreements were signed with the four countries of 'Central Europe' in the first place and later on with Romania and Bulgaria. This direction of the EC towards Bulgaria and Romania caused optimism in other countries of Central Eastern Europe since it underlined the fact that the EC would offer such association agreements to all the countries of Eastern Europe, which started up with the reforms (Mayhew, 1998: 24).

Nevertheless, the Copenhagen European Council that met in June 1993 took an important step, perhaps the most important one, by agreeing that the associated countries in Central and Eastern which desired shall become members of European Union (Mayhew, 1998). Accession would take place as soon as an associated country would be able to assure the obligations of membership by satisfying the economic and political conditions required (Mayhew, 1998: 161). By this claim, the final decision of the EU for an irreversible enlargement to the East was taken. As Friis and Murphy argue, this decision was mainly taken because the EU was unable to provide stability and security to the post-communist countries without a shift in the legal/institutional boundary (Friis & Murphy, 1999: 220).



The prospect for eventual EU membership was presented and perceived as the most important aspect of the democratic transition in the East Central Europe. The prospect of EU membership became the greatest return of the peaceful anti-communist revolutions, transition to democracy, and more importantly of the 'rediscovery of Central Europe'. The successful political representation of Central Europe as naturally belonging to Europe reshaped the future of this region in European Union.

### 2.3. The Economic and Political Transitions in East Central Europe

Directed by the wish of assuring a safe and a rapid transition, the countries of East Central Europe adjusted their political, economic and law systems according to the European systems. These countries were ready to implement whatever institutional reforms would drive them to Europe. Grabbe argues that 'the drive to join the EU has been one of the most powerful incentives for undertaking major reforms in the region'. The important role of the reforms 'offered by credible prospect of membership' has been stimulated by 'tangible benefits linked to progress in reforms, such as additional aid, trade access and political support' (Grabbe, 2003: 263).

According to Bideleux and Jeffries, the legitimacy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Habsburg Empire provided an important advantage to Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland in the enlargement process because the bureaucracy of the Empire was 'relatively competent, conscientious, impartial, professional, law-abiding and free from corruption' when compared to the countries of further southern and eastern Europe (1998: 292). According to the two authors 'the legacy of a relatively law-governed administrative tradition and society' is the true source of the placement of East Central European countries at the front of the queue for EU membership (Bideleux & Jeffries, 1998: 292). Nevertheless, the post-communist transition proved to be a hard one since it included simultaneous political and economic transformation in a terrain dominated by deep social-economic crisis; a context never met before in whatever political transformation. The governments of East Central Europe implemented first the strategy of liberalization of political life, and then, liberalization policies for

centrally planned economy. At the beginning of the post-communist transition the political transition enjoyed a relative priority over the socio-economic transition by creating 'some overpoliticization of the whole process temporarily' which later goes more in harmony with the socio-economic changes (Ágh, 1998a: 50).

In the early years of the post-communist transition too many political transformations, political fragmentation and an economic crisis have accompanied the efforts for the establishment of democratic political institutions. When the intellectuals of 1989 assured their compatriots that they would 'return them to Europe' the political system had only taken the first steps towards political democratization. Ágh argues that:

Historically, the Central European countries developed a particular mixture of authoritarian and democratic traditions with long authoritarian periods and short recurring reform-cycles of democratization. State socialism was not a completely alien element: but it reinforced and Easternized the long-term authoritarian traditions which were weaker in East Central Europe and stronger in the Balkans. The recent democratization has to break with these authoritarian traditions and the tendencies towards de-Europeanization (1998a: 51).

In this sense, even though ECE countries had a greater democratic tradition than the Balkans they faced different problems during democratization, which stem from the authoritarian traditions inherited by the communist rule (Ágh, 1998a: 51).

However, the political organizations of post-communism gave positive results in the long term. These can be observed in the recent transformation of the political parties themselves. The first opposition parties created around 1989 (except for Poland which has a long tradition of Solidarity) the so-called *movement-parties* represented an ideal 'unity of society and party' despite their being 'fragile and transitory political parties in a competitive multi-party system' (Ágh, 1998a: 103). These parties had no fixed memberships but only indefinite followers and participants, which stemmed from the fact that the parties did not represent the interests of a particular group in society. Moreover, these first parties emerging during the first years of political pluralism had no well-articulated programs and in general they did

not differ much in their objectives. The politics itself became a problem since the ECE countries suffered from an overload of parties and overparticipation, since all the socio-political groups became organized in political parties. However, in the early 1990s the East Central European parties succeeded at collecting some stable memberships and through this they paved the way for becoming 'national organizations with party programmes' (Ágh, 1998a: 104). With time the weak parties were eliminated and only the participatory strong political parties remained. The internal goals of coming to power and entering to the parliaments and the external objective of surviving internationally which would bring legitimacy at home reinforced the ECE political parties to structure and re-structure themselves according to the West-European party models.

The transition to democracy proved to be a challenge to the ECE societies in the aspect that they had to face different crisis at one time. The political crisis was caused mainly because of the new democratic institutions built upon the old low-performance bureaucratic institutions which evidently gave low results; and the renewal of authoritarian tendencies 'with a revival of nationalist- conservative traditionalism, in the form of both moderate and radical right tendencies' (Ágh, 1998a: 161).

In the second half of the 90s, when the Balkans failed at the first wave of democratic transition, the East Central Europe assured a kind of political and economic stability which legitimized the governments at home and gained their recognition and support in the West. The three countries of East Central Europe, opened-up their centrally planned economies, implemented privatization reforms which enhanced both the formation of capitalist mode of production and free market economy. With the liberalization and the adjustment of economies to European models, these countries started coming out of economic recession by late 1993-1994. Among them Poland performed better since by 1996 it was the first post-communist economy to recover its 1989 output (Blazyca, 2003: 221). The first model of shock therapies for the economies came from Poland in 1990 when the new Solidarity gave a great degree of authority to the finance minister, Leszek Balcerowicz, an economist committed to

neo-liberal solutions. His shock therapy consisted of prize liberalization but stiff wage control, currency convertibility with sharp devaluation, and a rigid fiscal squeeze (Blazyca, 2003: 225). The effects of these policies were devastating with a huge decline in Polish output; however that was necessary for an irreversible marketization of the economy.

As Balcerowicz explains, the direction of East Central European transition of post-communist era is parallel to the elsewhere economic reforms: 'less state, more private enterprise and market' (Balcerowicz, 2000: 230-231). According to the Polish ex-Minister, the economic success of the East Central European countries lied in the implementation of the shock therapies in the period of what he calls, 'extraordinary politics', thus in the early years of post-communist transition. This period is described as the time in which the radical reforms are mostly supported and accepted by the masses (Balcerowicz, 2000: 237). Therefore, the best period of the economic reforms and market liberalization is that of extraordinary politics, which guaranteed economic recovery in a relatively short period of time. These market regulations facilitated the economic approach of ECE to Europe.

The countries of East Central Europe, which are by now formal members of EU, are living their fourteenth year of post-communism. They have by now made a definite break with the former communist rule and continue implementing democratic reforms in spheres of social, political and economic activities. The 'return to Europe', which they thought would come as fast as an eye blink after the anti-communist revolution, proved to be more difficult than it was envisaged at the beginning of transition. The discourse on Central Europe's natural affinity to Western Europe assisted the relatively fast integration of the region to European structure and most importantly to the EU. At the same time, the EU institutions and officials even though later than expected, are becoming successful on overcoming the old divisions between the 'East' and 'West' Europe. However, this gradual ongoing process of European enlargement has not still obtained its final shape since many other countries of what used to be referred to as Eastern Europe are waiting for EU membership and clear integration policies.

Finally, the drive to escape from the Soviet domination opened the way to the reconstruction of ECE countries' national history and identity through which they aimed a detachment from the 'East' and a rapprochement to 'Europe'. The enlargement to the east itself was initiated by the discourse of the so-called Central Europe, emphasizing the European character of the region. The countries of the region apart from redesigning their identities, they also redesigned their politico-economic structures and laws according to the EU standards for the sake of becoming a part of 'united Europe'.

In order to comprehend the main pillars of the contemporary Albanian identity and its representation by the political elite, it is necessary to make a general historical review of the Albanian national ideology formation. In the following chapter first the national endeavors for the consolidation of an Albanian state and identity are put in a historical perspective, then the political terrain where the post-communist history and identity develop, are presented. The chapter also provides a close view to the political developments in Albania since the early twentieth century, and it puts some light on the tradition of authoritarian regimes.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALBANIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE POLITICS OF POST-COMMUNISM

In order to better understand the political and cultural developments in post-communist Albania, it is indispensable to have a look at Albania's historical attempts for the consolidation of the nation state. For the purpose of distinguishing between the early conceptualization of the Albanian nation and that of post-communist one changes a historical analysis of the construction of Albanian national ideology and identity is introduced in the following section.

#### 3.1. A Historical Review of the Construction of Albanian Identity

The modern national history of Albania is generally accepted to begin in the late nineteenth century with the romantic national movement, which was converted in the 1870s into a real political movement aiming the creation of an Albanian independent state. During this period, which is referred as the Albanian National Awakening, the national patriots continued their struggle 'with guns and pens'<sup>3</sup> for the formation of an Albanian nation state, based on the model of modern West European nations. After the proclamation of independence in 1912, Albanians assured their own nation but the situation did not get any better up to the rise of the Albanian Kingdom under Ahmet Zogu, who despite of his authoritarian manners succeeded at creating social cohesion and integration to a certain extent. During the Second World War Albania

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<sup>3</sup> This slogan was used by Albanian intellectuals of the nineteenth century, highlighting that the armed struggle for independence ought to be supported by Albanian literacy, which would help raising the consciousness of Albanians as a distinct nation.

became a battleground for Italian, German, Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian army forces. Later, with the monopolization of the partisan war by the newly emerged Albanian Communist Party, led by Enver Hoxha, the premises for a modern European future for Albanians lessened. During the Communist regime (1944-1991) the Stalinist ideology predominated in all aspects of Albanian life and the socialist principles became the new identity of Albanian nation. With the death of Enver Hoxha in 1985, his follower Ramiz Alia, initiated some slight reforms but it was too little for Albania going through an economic recession, which evidently harmed the communist ideology. In 1991 the communist regime collapsed and the dictatorship was overturned. Remaining the last European country to get rid of communism, Albanian post-communist governments initiated an opening up of Albania to the world and are continuously spending a lot of efforts on catching up with Europe.

### 3.1.1 The National Awakening

The contemporary Albanian history experienced one of its milestones in the late nineteenth century with the attempts of Albanian intellectuals and patriots to create an independent Albanian nation state. The Albanian National Awakening, known also as the 'Albanian National Renaissance' (*Rilindja Kombëtare*), was initiated by national intellectuals and clerics living abroad, as a romantic national movement which aimed the development of a cultural and historical awareness of Albania as a distinct nation. European Enlightenment and the influence of the writings of western travellers and scholars who while travelling the Balkans discovered Albania referred to it as the 'European Turkey' or 'Near East', 'as if hinting at something already lost', inspired the intellectuals of Albanian national awakening (Misha, 2002: 33). In general, the Enlightenment was seen as the ideological catalyst of the national awakening movements in the Balkans (Kitromilides, 1994: 59).

S. Draper in "The conceptualization of an Albanian nation" notes that 'there must be some driving force behind the nationalist movement' and 'there must be some need which will be answered by identification as a national community' (1997: 124). The author argues that the identification on national basis was mainly motivated by the

fear of any Orthodox Slavs domination on Albania, and by the distinction between the Albania Catholics and Muslims with the surrounding Orthodox communities, at the time when the Ottoman Empire had started to contract (Draper, 1997: 124-5). Consequently, the Albanian National Awakening had no economic character as in the 'West' but it was mainly a political and cultural renaissance. More than any other country, for the formation of a national ideology, Albania was depended on intellectuals of émigré communities who played a prominent role at nurturing national self-consciousness of Albanian population and presented national claims to the international arena (Malcolm, 2002: 72). The Albanian National Awakening aimed at reminding Albanians of some historical nodal points upon which the new consciousness of Albanian identity would be constructed. In this sense, national renaissance was a process of rebirth of the Albanian collective memory (Misha, 1997: 37).

Historically speaking, the centralist *Tanzimat* reforms decreed in 1839 aiming to modernize the Ottoman Empire met with the rigid opposition of local *beys* in Albania, and the dissatisfaction of tribes of north which were 'always skeptical of and recusant to anything the Turks might do' (Elsie, 2004: 5). Particularly in the north, the *Tanzimat* reforms led to a succession of uprisings against the Sublime Porte, in the period of which 'the seeds of Albanian nationalism were sown' (Elsie, 2004: 5). However, the Albanian national awakening was converted into a political movement later, in the 1870s with the end of the Turkish-Russian war in which Turks were defeated. The defeat of the Turks had two prominent impacts on Albania. First, it alarmed Ottoman Empire's disintegration and invoked the need for the Albanians to develop a national consciousness and to finalize it with the creation of an Albanian autonomous nation. Second, the defeat of the Turks pronounced the threat of partition of Albanian territories by the newly created Balkan nation-states like Serbia, Greece and Montenegro. In this decisive moment of the Albanian national history, the Albanians, divided into four different *vilayets* of Ottoman Empire with almost no communication among them, attempted to show the world that they possessed nation formation abilities and they would not watch their partition among the Slavic countries without doing something. The fact that the



southern Albanian Orthodox communities were also included in the early nationalist's delimitation of Albanian nation, is generally taken as a proof of a pre-existing national consciousness (Draper, 1997: 125). The struggle for autonomy and sovereignty in Albania was to develop at a slow pace because of the high level of Islamization, and predominantly due to the lack of unity within the country (Elsie, 2004: 5). The process of defining the national territories was interrelated with the construction of national myths, symbols and histories for legitimizing the continuity in their territories and for achieving national homogenisation and unity.

Up to the nineteenth century, Albania was regarded merely as a geographical expression that did not invoke a distinct nation to the foreign empires. It is suggested that, the fact that Albanians were the last Balkan people at attempting to create their independent state indicate that Albanians were not willing of detaching from the Ottoman Empire, since they were the favoured people of the Empire, who held high positions in the Ottoman administration. Nevertheless, 'the long dormant seeds of Albanian national awakening finally sprouted', and this happened not only in Albania but also in the flourishing Albanian communities abroad, mainly in Constantinople, in Romania, Greece, Bulgaria and among the *Arbëresh* in South Italy (Elsie, 2004: 5). At the time, among the Albanian elite, essentially two were the predominant views about the future of the nation: while the feudalists supported the idea of an Albanian nation within the Ottoman Empire, the liberals maintained that it was the right time for creating an Albanian autonomous nation-state. The liberal view gained massive support once it was seen that the Ottoman Empire was about to capitulate. Plasari describes these two views as the 'two fronts' of the nationalist movement, at the one front of which the liberals aimed the salvation of the nation and its participation in European civilization, whereas at the other, the traditionalists exhibited their Ottoman and Eastern orientation (Plasari, 1992: 23).

The fact that the Berlin Congress which intended to divide the Albanian territories was about to gather, accelerated the decision of the Albanian nationalists to come together in order to proclaim their *Besa* (pledged word), and to take immediate decisions about escaping the danger of an Albanian partition among the neighbour

countries. The nationalist ideas became finally consolidated in the League of Prizren in 1878 that was a memorable time for Albanian awakening. It became the first organization in the Albanian history that acted on behalf of the Albanian nation (Sulstarova, 2003: 25). With the League of Prizren, the romantic national movement was transformed into a genuine political movement carrying an Albanian nationalist ideology (Misha, 2002: 40). The League was thought to help Albanians forming their own independent state and bringing the Albanian question into the world's attention later on. The League was defeated by the Turks, and it failed in a short period. Even though the Serbs and the Montenegrins with the military help of the Great Powers annexed several Albanian towns and villages, the League at least succeeded in making heard that in the Balkans there was a 'nation ready and willing to die in the defense of her territorial integrity' (Giaffo, 1999: 274).

The Albanian national movement aimed the creation of a culturally and linguistically homogeneous nation, the rediscovery of an Albanian ethno-history, the construction of an Albanian alphabet and assuring the recognition of the country in the international arena. What possessed the potential for becoming a crucial element of national cohesion in the divided Albania of nineteenth century was *language*. Language became a centrifugal force in committing the Albanian people of three different religions living into four vilayets of Ottoman Empire, into the Albanian national question. According to the intellectuals of nineteenth century, the promoters of Albanian identity, the usage of Albanian language would assure the continuity of Albanian nation and Albanian national identity. These nationalist intellectuals emphasized language because according to them the education of Albanian people in their mother tongue was central to the modernization of the country and for its place in European civilization (Sulstarova, 2003: 35). Given that language became the main pillar of Albanian nationalism, the nationalists presented it as one of the most ancient and precious languages of Europe. The prominence of language was central to the work of Naim Frashëri, an important contributor of Albanian Renaissance. For the poet, the Albanian language was 'the best' and 'the most precious language of all' (Frashëri, 1970). In a poem dedicated to it, he concluded by stating that 'the language of Albania/is the language of God' (Frashëri, 1986: 128).

The nationalists were quite conscious that the Albanian language served in the first place to distinguish Albanians from the neighbours who had serious territorial claims towards the country. Sami Frashëri, another poet and nationalist of nineteenth century, in order to reinforce the link between nation and language, claimed that 'who changes his language changes also his nation, and becomes part of the other nation' (Frashëri, 1988: 244). He thought that the cultivation of native language would bring with it the preservation of Albanian national identity.

'The recreation of the past is an indispensable part of any process which makes people a nation' (Misha, 2002: 41). For this reason, the history and the reconstruction of the past are important pillars in the construction of the Albanian national identity. In the light of the nationalist discourse Albanian poets, intellectuals, ethnographers and folklorists of the nineteenth century who worked for the creation of the Albanian nation, perceived nationalism as a movement for national awakening. The Albanian elite living abroad brought home an extraordinary literacy based on image making and consciousness rising of Albania. Sami Frashëri in one of his novels highlighted: 'we are the most ancient people of Europe, the most noble and courageous one; we speak the most ancient and beautiful language of all Aryan languages' (Frashëri, 1899: 145). The intellectuals of national renaissance constructed a glorious past for Albania dominated by continuous national struggle. Usually, they referred to the Albanian national identity as a sleeping beauty, which woke up in the wake of the Slavic threat of partition to the country.

The work of national awakening movement promoted the theory on the Pelasgian origin, according to which Albanians were the most ancient people of the Balkans, descendants of ancient Pelasgian. The Pelasgians were thought to be the first people that came to Europe. However, the Pelasgian origin was substituted later on by the theory of Illyrian descent since the former was impossible to prove whereas many academic researches supported the latter (Misha, 2002: 42). Nevertheless, for Albanian nationalists the scientific support of the Pelasgian origin was not as important as its political impact was. The Renaissance men used the Illyrian inheritance as an element providing historical affinity with Europe, since the ancient

Illyria was thought to be a civilized region of Roman Empire. Consequently, the Illyrian descent theory was used at the National Renaissance period as an evidence of historical continuity in Kosovo and South Albania, which consisted to the areas contested by the Serbs and the Greeks (Misha, 2002: 42).

In order to support the issue of a glorious past a mythical figure from the medieval times was 'created'. Gjergj Kastrioti, known as Skënderbeg, was Albania's best-known medieval figure, who had fought for the independence of his home country during the fifteenth century. Evidently, Skënderbeg was promoted as the Albanian national hero, and was represented as the first man acting on behalf of Albanian nation. His memories and stories are still alive in the cultural tradition. As he was the best-known Albanian combater, who possessed a particular potential of nation formation, it was not difficult to provide him with some national significance and turn him into a myth. Skënderbeg was a Christian Albanian taken hostage and trained by the Ottomans, who turned back to his home city (Krujë) and for twenty-five years fought successfully against the Turks. According to Misha, Skënderbeg became a national hero even though his action did not involve all Albanians and all Albanian territories (Misha, 2002: 43). Yet, the transformation of Skënderbeg into a national symbol served not only to the national cohesion but it was also used as an argument indicating Albania's cultural affinity to Europe (Misha, 2002: 43). Evidently, the fact that Skënderbeg was a Christian Catholic was never mentioned in the nationalist discourse, since it was developing unbound to religion. In conjunction with this, the nationalists also inserted the myth of permanent national struggle, which implied that Albanians had permanently resisted the foreign occupation of Romans, Goths, Slavs and more importantly the Turks. The myth of permanent struggle for defending Albanian identity against outsiders was mainly used at the support of the idea of permanent consciousness of national identity (Malcolm, 2002: 81).

Another myth created at the age of national renaissance is that of 'ethnic homogeneity and cultural purity' (Malcolm, 2002: 79). The nationalists for escaping the partition of Albanian territories between the Slavs and the Greeks found it necessary to show that the Albanians had always lived in the same place and have

managed to survive as a pure race uncontaminated by any foreign element. In the entire Albanian Renaissance literacy there exists a prevalent belief that the Albanians were 'a white Aryan race', descended from the ancient Illyrians. By the use of all these myths, the intellectuals of Albanian renaissance intruded to the Albanian people the love for the 'motherland' and the pride of being Albanian.

An element of crucial importance that possessed a large potential for becoming a real obstacle to the process of Albanian nation state formation, was religion. Since the Ottoman *millet* system used to give a central political significance to religious divisions, religion became a major source of identity in the Balkans (Duijzing, 2002: 60). However, the nationalists recognized that only if Albanians would leave alone their religious divisions they would manage to create a united Albanian nation state. On the other hand, as Malcolm genuinely stated, over the centuries Albanians had produced many devoted believers, Muslim and Christian, 'and it would be absurd to suggest that these people were somehow less Albanian by virtue of possessing genuine religious beliefs' (2002: 84).

The different religious faiths and religious fanaticism were considered a threat to Albanian nation for the reason that it would not only make the provision of national unity more difficult, but it would enforce the identification of Albanian people along religious lines. It simply meant that the Muslim Albanians would identify with the Turks and the Orthodox Albanians with the Greeks. The Orthodox community of southern Albania was threatened by the aggressive activity of the Greek Church, which propagandised the Greek identity among the regional populace. For this purpose, the creation of an autocephalous Albanian Orthodox Church had always been considered as a prerequisite for the creation of an Albanian independent state for escaping the Greek chauvinism.

For the purpose of handling the religious divisions, the elite of national awakening encouraged a secular nationalism model, indifferent to religion. This was eminent in Pashko Vasa's phrase 'Do not turn towards churches or mosques/the faith of all Albanians is Albanianism' (Vasa, 1987: 39); or in Sami Frashëri's expression 'The

Albanians have been Albanian before that they become Christian or Muslim' (Frashëri, 2003: 79). According to the Albanian nationalists the Albanian identity ought not to be based on the religion, as it was the case with the Greeks and Serbs, but on the language, territory and race. This implied the necessity for all religion faiths to become subservient to the process of nation formation.

The Albanian national identity during the national awakening was developed against the Turkish, the Greek, the Montenegrin, and the Serbian identities. In the Renaissance literature particularly the Turks were demonised and presented as 'merciless barbarians', as fanatics and Orientals. At the other pole, the idea that the Albanians were not Slav people was presented as a trait showing their 'Europeanness'. Additionally, the Slav people and particularly the Serbs were perceived as one of the main 'others' of the Albanian nation.

In the national awakening period, the idea of Europe played a particularly important role in the process of Albanian nation formation. Europe was not only a model according to which the intellectuals of National Renaissance thought of modernizing Albania, but European powers had a great influence on the Greeks and Serbs who attempted many times to partition Albania among them. Europe was the land of aspirations, 'the incarnation of civilisation, power, the dream of well being, the shelter in which to feel secure and protected' (Misha, 2002: 44). At the other side of the coin, Europe in many cases was presented as unfriendly, and 'faithless'. An Albanian liberal writer in one of his works questioned the meaning of Europe in the early twentieth century: 'people who live in Europe are called European or stupid; because only a stupid can seriously pretend that Europe means civilization' (Bulka, 2003: 876). This attack on Europe can be explained only by the Albanian common belief that Europe was the source of many injustices committed against Albania, including their partition (Misha, 2002: 44). Regarding so-called oscillations between East and West in the process of national identity construction and country's orientation the ideas of national awakening period promoted Albania's affiliation to Europe and the West.

### 3.1.2 The Rise of the Monarchy

Albania proclaimed its independence in 1912 with almost half of its territories left outside of the national boundaries. Nevertheless, the hostile neighbours furthered the territorial claims towards the country. It was not until 1913, after the Second Balkan war, that the international community agreed to support Albania 'as a neutral, sovereign, and hereditary principality' (Elsie, 2004: 8). By a western compromise solution in 1914, the German Prince Wilhelm zu Wied was sent for governing Albania. The Prince proved unsuccessful in retaining public order and he left within six months. In the following period, for the first time the process of creation of political parties emerged in Albania. In 1920, the Congress of Lushnja was gathered for opposing the pronouncements of Paris Peace Conference according to which, Albania would experience a further partition among the Serbs and Greeks. In the congress, Tirana was proclaimed the capital of Albania and a government led by Sulejman bey Delvina emerged. This was the first real Albanian government whose goal was gaining control over all Albanian territories, creating a strong state and promulgating the Albanian Constitution. In the same year, Albania was admitted to the League of Nations, which was expected with high enthusiasm among the Albanians. Giaffo describes the year 1920 as 'the annus mirabilis' for people in perpetual crisis (1999: 349).

In the period between 1920-1924 Albania took its first important steps towards democracy and law enforcement. The first Albanian Parliament where two small political groupings coexisted was created in April 1921. The Popular Party, which was led by bishop Fan Noli, a Harvard graduate, had a liberal-bourgeois character and apparently it protected the interests of bourgeoisie class. The Progressive Party, which shared conservative ideas, was led by Hoxhë Kadriu. Both these parties played a prominent role in the formation of the new Albanian state. In spite of this, the processes of the formation and organization of the modern Albanian state were carried out in a harsh political climate created between the competition of the conservatives and the liberal-bourgeois groups for coming to power. In this political terrain, 12 governments perpetually replaced each other within four years. With time,

Ahmet Zogu, a follower of Noli and Minister of Interior, accompanied by his supporters started alienating from the liberal-bourgeois program and began supporting the conservatives. In 1922 when he became Prime Minister of the country because of his increasingly authoritarian tendencies, an anti-Zogist position was formed in the parliament. Afterwards, the previous parties dissolved and they were replaced by the governmental conservative group led by Zogu and the democratic opposition led by Noli.

During these years, the opposition spent great efforts on overthrowing Zogu and coming to power, forming a democratic state and enabling the total transformation of economy from feudalism to capitalism. The call for revolt came after the murder of the prominent democrat Avni Rustemi in 1924, when the opposition retained the government responsible for the murder. The protest was rapidly turned to an armed struggle. Noli had the support of the main Albanian nationalists, the Catholic clergy, and the domestic democratic forces in general. In June 1924, the protesters entered in Tirana and immediately after that Zogu and his cabinet escaped to the neighbour countries. This revolt in Albania is referred to as the *June Revolution*.

Noli settled a new government and created a new program that intended the formation of an entirely modern Western state. The program among other points included the general disarmament of the population; exalting the authority of the state over any personal power; uprooting feudalism and establishing democracy; and introducing radical reforms in all the fields of administration, both civil and military (Fischer, 1984: 66). According to Fischer, Noli had a well-determined radical program but he lacked two important elements: financial banking and domestic support (Fischer, 1984: 66). Despite the democrats' attempts at building good relations with European and the neighbour countries, these countries did not recognize this government since Noli could not manage to hold general parliamentary elections. Noli's government truly supported the national interests and defended the Albanian territories and liberties in the international arena.



In the same year Zogu assisted by the Yugoslavs and the army succeeded in overthrowing Noli's government in December 1924. The day that Zogu entered Tirana with his troops was declared as the 'legality day' (Fischer, 1984: 75). This event signed the failure of the June Revolution, though its radical program had a great impact in the uprooting of feudalism and the beginning of capitalism and democracy. Zogu immediately proclaimed himself commander-in-chief and instituted the martial law until a conventional government could be set up (Fischer, 1984: 75). He tried to consolidate his position by further action and by proclaiming himself Prime Minister of Albania within a month. Zogu within a year had concentrated all the state power to his position. He undertook considerable actions for suppressing the opposition forces and for reorganizing the state power. Many of the prominent democrats and opposition forces were assassinated whereas others were obliged to leave the country. Some opponents like Faik Konica, a well-known Albanian democrat and intellectual of the time, instead of abandoning the country and accepting the failure of democracy opted to collaborate with Zogu regime. Despite these developments, all the political forces appreciated the proclamation of Albania as a Republic in 1925. This decision of Zogu government played a crucial role on strengthening of the Albanian nation and on assuring public support for the regime.

While the political instability sustained, the economy of the country worsened. Zogu long before 1925 had concluded that the Albanian economy could never ameliorate without extensive foreign assistance (Fischer, 1984: 82). However, European powers declared that without political stability they could not guarantee the loan. Zogu being increasingly distrustful to Belgrade requested the loan from the Italians, despite the acknowledgement that Italy aimed the domination of Albania. Left with no other solution Zogu government with the request of Mussolini was constrained to sign two pacts, which declared Albania under Italian protection. The opposition harshly criticized these actions given that it endangered the sovereignty of the country. For this purpose during the communist regime, Zogu was referred to merely as 'the man who sold Albania to the Italians'. Zogu, referring to the pact had declared: 'I have concluded the Pact because I was convinced that it is and will be a guarantee for the

peace in the Balkans, and that it will have historical consequences' (Swire, 1971: 438). He also highlighted that he was encouraged by Mussolini's declaration that "Italy considers the independence and territorial integrity of Albania as a guarantee of her own position in the Adriatic" (Swire, 1971: 483-4). The cost of these pacts, which provided a relative political and economic stability to Albania in the following time period, was that it firmly put the country under the political and financial control of Italy. While perhaps an exaggeration, there is still something to Fischer's comment that Zogu saw himself as clever whereas the Italians as weak, based on the belief that Zogu would always be able to use the Italians for his own goals (138: 138).

In response to the protest of the opposition and due to the fear of losing power, Zogu proclaimed Albania as Monarchy in September 1, 1928, and himself as the King. Albania's brief and turbulent experience of democracy seemed not a solution to the new monarch. It appeared that only a 'strong centralized government of a monarchy could bring things under control' (Jacques, 1995: 386). According to the main status of the Monarchy, Albania became a 'democratic, parliamentary and hereditary kingdom' where the division of the three powers was assured<sup>4</sup>. In the aftermath of the announcement of the monarchy, the state undertook other reforms and entered into a process of construction of modern institutions according to the West European models. Zogu replaced the Ottoman laws with a new modern legislation, and in a short period, his government approved the first Penal Code in the history of Albania. These acts were followed by the approval of the Civil Code and the Trade Arrangements. With the legal reforms, important steps were taken towards the formation of a stable Albanian state. The King succeeded in establishing law and order in a country where these experiences were quite unknown (Jacques, 1995: 387). Even though the activity of the political parties was banned and the opposition was not allowed, all the radical institutional reforms had a positive impact in the national integration. They facilitated the strengthening of the national awareness and constructed the main pillars for a modern Albanian state. Despite the King's strong

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<sup>4</sup> *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar* (1999). Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese e Librit Shkollor.

authoritarian tendencies, during the monarchy the Albanian state moved further to its consolidation.

During this period of confusion, the Albanian intellectuals continued the tradition of the national awakening period. Many revolutionary authors devoted their work to the Albanian question and reflected the Albanian reality in their poems and novels. For instance, the work of Migjeni<sup>5</sup> reflected clearly the injustices of Zogu regime and the love of Albanians for freedom. The literature of this period was still dominated by the wish for liberty and sovereignty. In the work of the prominent Franciscan friar Gjergj Fishta dominated the themes of Albanian patriotism, love for the country, revolutionary politics and hostility against the Serbs, the Montenegrins and the Greeks. Other authors like Asdreni and Ndre Mjeda reminded the Albanians of the ideas of renaissance that Albania was a magnificent land, and Albanians were ethnically homogeneous people speaking the most beautiful language of all. However, the foremost Albanian intellectuals of the first decades of the twentieth century were Fan Noli and Faik Konica whose articles and journals have a great merit to the presentation of Albania to the world. Even though they tried to keep alive the ideas of national renaissance, they could not succeed at forming a completely homogeneous thematic of the materials due to their political divisions of the interwar period (see Malcolm, 2002: 71). Nevertheless, in the post-1912 period the consolidation of Albanian nation and identity was carried through governmental and political elite action, and that is the reason why the political developments have a greater significance.

King Zogu's regime continued up to 1939 when Italy occupied Albania. Even though Albania was economically highly dependent on Italy, their relations deteriorated mainly because the Albanian government never accepted the Italian domination. In the morning of April 7, 1939 King Zogu and his cabinet left Albania and the country got under Italian control. In few days, the national sovereignty of Albania came to the end. As a response to these developments an anti-fascist national movement emerged. This movement later on was led by the Communist Party, which was

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<sup>5</sup> Millosh Gjergj Nikolla was known as Migjeni (1911-1938).

formed in November 1941 with the assistance of Yugoslavs. The Communist Party (CP) in its program aimed at two main objectives: the unification of all Albanian forces regardless of the religious, regional, or political divisions against the Italian fascists; and the creation of an Albanian National Army for fighting the Italians. Subsequent to the creation of Communist Party, the anti-fascist movement gained national dimensions under the name 'National Liberation Movement'.

In the Peza Conference held in September 1942 it was decided to create the Anti-Fascist National Liberation Front (ANLF), which would command and guide the Albanian forces against the Italian occupation. Some anti-communist nationalists did not recognize the decisions of the Peza Conference since they anticipated that the interests of CP were hidden behind the mobilization for anti-fascist struggle. These forces unified and in November 1942 created the National Front (*Balli Kombëtar*). In 1943 the supporters of the Zogist monarchy, which up to that time were mobilized inside the National Liberation Front, diverted and created the Legality Party. These two political forces, *Balli Kombëtar* and the Legality, became the main opponents of the Communist Party. Much to the delight of the communists, they were represented as dissenters and collaborators, first of the Italians and later of the Germans. With the capitulation of Italy in 1943 and Germany in 1944 the Communist Party, which directed the National Liberation War became the promoters of Albanian independence and liberty. The National Liberation Front led by Enver Hoxha, by monopolizing the partisan liberation war, had succeeded at unifying the Albanian people and the Albanian political forces in a national war for freedom and sovereignty. This war was used as the legitimating source of the following socialist regime.

In the final analysis, the government of Zogu had both its weakness and strengths. Even though it created an authoritarian regime, Zogu's attempts for establishing a modern state remained far-reaching. King Zogu was the first man who could provide law and order, and assure national cohesion and integrity in Albania. For the first time Albania was organized in a single administrative unit and was ruled by Albanians themselves. However, the failure of the King to return to Albania

personally after 1939 to direct military resistance is considered to be responsible for the definitive Communist takeover (Jacques, 1995: 405).

### 3.1.3. The Communist Period

When Enver Hoxha's communist regime took over, Albania knew too little of democracy and much more of authoritarianism. The partisan victory, which signed the great break with the past, meant that the Albanian society 'could be reshaped by the communist government to such an extent that new forms of identity, such as nationalism, would emerge triumphant' (Draper, 1997: 129). The first thing the communists did after they came in power became the extermination of the entire opponent forces, which possessed any potential of challenging the new ideology. The national ideology had a great weight during the communist period since the regime was completely reliant upon its strength and influence. The communists used the national ideology for the justification of their right to direct Albania, a justification which importance increased as Albania moved towards political isolation (Draper, 1997: 130). Enver Hoxha formulated the main pillars of national ideology and then with the help of a huge staff of writers, intellectuals and film producers spread it to the people.

For legitimating the communist regime and for showing historical continuity, Enver Hoxha made a great use of the nationalist ideology of Albanian Renaissance. Many of the myths of the past were preserved and nourished, whereas the Albanian 'glorious past' was enriched by the partisan war. The cult of the partisan war reached great dimensions so that textbooks and traditional histories, literature, drama, film and music, were all restricted to the same theme (Fischer, 2002: 142). Generally, the Albanian history was imagined passing at least through four great moments: the Illyrian battles, Skënderbeg wars against the Ottomans, the Albanian Renaissance and the partisan war (Lubonja, 2002: 95). Evidently, the myth of permanent struggle remained alive during the communist regime. The partisan war, led by the communists themselves, was glorified and represented as a continuation of the initiatives of the nationalists of Albanian Renaissance period and was regarded as a

great moment of Albanian national history. The need to combine communist and nationalist ideologies for gaining credibility of the regime made necessary the elaboration and enlargement of national myths (Lubonja, 2002: 96). Many books and novels written by the communist writers repromoted the myth of Skënderbeg. The promoters and the leaders of the national awakening were mythologized and glorified as the champions of Albanian sovereignty, and as heirs to Skënderbeg's struggle.

A great importance was ascribed to the issue of national unity since the system necessitated that the Albanians remained united against the imaginative foreign occupiers and the native conspirators. For reaching national cohesion, a great effort was spent on the homogenization of population, which inherited serious cultural and social cleavages from the past. The 'unity' emphasized by the regime was obvious in slogans like 'All for one and one for all'. Indeed, the ideology against regional divisions was in contrast to the system practice because the communism favored some regions where the support for the communism had been greater since the beginning (Sulstarova, 2003: 71). Thus, while homogenizing the Albanian population Enver Hoxha actually 'subjected the Geg<sup>6</sup> identity to the Tosk one. The Tosk dialect was made the base of the official language', and many regional and cultural elements employed by the Tosks gained the status of the 'national' or 'correct', whereas in many cases the way of life of Glegs gained the status of deviance (Sulstarova, 2002a: 52).

Conversely, the myths of Enver Hoxha and the Communist Party were also promoted. All of these top-down ideological initiatives of the Party created in Albania a virtual world, where people lived in the well-determined framework of the Party (Lubonja, 2002: 97). A. Standish claims that during the process of constructing its own myth, 'Enver Hoxha syncretized Albanian identity' (2002: 121). Enver Hoxha was mythologized as the creator of the socialist movement possessing virtues such as wisdom, leadership, foresight, charisma, and courage. Hoxha, the first Secretary of Communist Party since its creation, was represented as a semi-divine

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<sup>6</sup>Although nowadays distinguishing among Glegs and Tosks is not easy because of the homogenization of the population that occurred during Hoxha regime, they refer to two distinct ethnic/linguistic/cultural groups.

leader and teacher (Standish, 2002: 122). With the establishment of Communist rule the name of the Communist Party was changed to the *Albanian Party of Labour* (APL). In the Albanian History of the Party of Labour it was declared that: 'Enver Hoxha is the most beloved teacher and leader of the whole Albanian people, united in steel-like unity around the Party and the Central Committee' (cited in Standish, 2002: 122). The dictator became the absolute leader and the key figure in the construction of 'new' Albania.

The Stalinist ideology affected dramatically the process of national identity formation during Hoxha regime. The Albanian history was perceived as experiencing a rebirth with the establishment of communism and the ideology of 'the new man' and the 'new Albania'. This implied detachment from the past and the beginning of a new life and history for Albania. Children since the primary school were taught to love the Party, their leader, Enver Hoxha and their native land. In general, an intense feeling of love for their country pervaded the national character of Albanians during the communism; love for the Party to which a semi-divine role was assigned; and for Enver Hoxha, which was imagined as the very heir of Skënderbeg.

With respect to religion, the Enverist regime continued the nationalist thesis that religion had played a divisive role throughout the Albanian history, and that is why it ought to be withered away. The final decision was taken in 1967 with the ban of all religious practice and the closing of all churches and mosques after which, Albania became the first official atheist country in the world. From a nationalist point of view the three existing religions were seen as dividers of the Albanians, while from the communists' standpoint they were viewed as representatives of an old conservative world, as Marx's 'opium of the people' (Lubonja, 2002: 95). The Catholic clergy was persecuted more than the other religious clerks were given that they had a stronger association with a foreign power namely the Vatican (O'Donnell, 1999: 139). The emptiness created by the prohibition of religious practices was filled with the communist ideology and the preaching of the goods and opportunities the Party was bringing to the Albanian people. Enver Hoxha tried to inculcate the atheist

propaganda into the minds of the children at school benefiting from the young age of Albanian population, which would lead to more and more Albanians not knowing about the religion (O'Donnell, 1999: 141). The ideology advocated that the Albanian people were the happiest and the luckiest people of the world given that they had the Party to think about them. This was present in the slogans like '*Lum si ne per ty Parti*'<sup>7</sup> that expresses the 'gratefulness' of Albanian people to the Party.

Evidently, the allies of Albania differed after the end of the Second World War because of the break of the relations with the Anglo-Americans. During the communist regime, the 'West' was denounced as imperialist-revisionist representing the ideological 'other' of the country. The communists limited their international contacts only to the communist world; Yugoslavia, Soviet Union and China successively. After the break with China in 1976, Albania entered into an unprecedented political situation during which for the first time in its modern history it lacked a foreign protector or a big brother (O'Donnell, 1999: 83). In response to this, Enver Hoxha declared in 1978 that Albania was determined to 'forge ahead and build socialism relying on its forces' (Biberaj, 1986: 146). After that, the themes of 'self-reliance', 'austerity', and 'thrift' became the most important words for the Albanian society. The isolationism was accompanied by a xenophobic character, which penetrated the national identity through the communism period. As Bideleux and Jeffries note, the repeated Anglo-American trials to overthrow the Hoxha regime in 1947, 1949, 1950 and 1952, combined with the increasing resentment against Yugoslav communist tutelage and the deep interference in Albania's internal affairs caused a fast deterioration of Hoxha's relation with the former British, American and Yugoslav allies (1998: 549-50). These developments helped to convert this relatively Westernized, cosmopolitan and middle-class Marxist intellectual into 'Eastern Europe's most paranoid and xenophobic communist dictator, who naturally turned to and increasingly modelled himself upon Stalin (Bideleux & Jeffries, 1998: 550).

As in every epoch of mythology, the heroes of the communist period had also their anti-heroes: the Roman invaders, the Turks, the Serbs and the Greeks, the Nazi-

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<sup>7</sup> In Albanian it means 'Blessed are we to have you Party'. (Author's translation)



Fascists and their Albanian cooperators (Lubonja, 2002: 95). Nevertheless, leaving alone the Serbs and the Greeks which were always considered as a source of threat to Albania's sovereignty, Enver Hoxha reinforced the belief that the Balkan countries were friends and partners but Europe wanted them quarrelling with each other (Sulstarova, 2003: 77). Hoxha attempted to create a strong Balkan identity by presenting the Greeks and the Serbs as the common 'other'. Moreover, the communist regime represented also as the enemies of the Albanian nation those people who dared to oppose the communist regime and the ones who did not join the National Liberation Front but other opposition forces like *Legality* or *Balli Kombëtar*. Together with this, the enemies of the Albanian nation were claimed to be the ex-dominating class, the landowners, and the entrepreneurs. Sulstarova claims that, this was natural for a society, which was imagined without antagonist classes and class domination (2003: 75).

Regarding the 'Albanian question', during communism Hoxha neglected confronting the issue firstly because in many moments Yugoslavia was a major support for communist Albania and Hoxha regime was not interested in fighting with Yugoslavia. Enver Hoxha called that the Albanians of Yugoslavia do not ask for national independence, given that their independence would weaken both the Yugoslavian federation and the socialism in the world (Sulstarova, 2003: 82). Apparently, if the harsh communist regime left Albania lagging behind the world developments, it certainly has great merits on the consolidation of the Albanian nation and the provision of social cohesion and unity in the society. As Ágh argues, even though Albania was the worst totalitarian system in Europe, in Enver Hoxha era particular achievements in creating the national existence and unity of Albania were reached (1998b: 286). These ideas are also maintained by Draper, who marks the same point: 'communism provided the first modern, stable state governments and infrastructure upon which overarching ideas of identity, such as nationalism, could readily grow' (1997: 123). As generally accepted, communism was certainly a crucial period for the consolidation of Albanian nation.

#### 3.1.4. The Post-Communist Era

1991 was the year of the collapse of what Albanians referred to as 'the last barricade in Europe of pure communism'. The failure of national communism was clearly indicated in the way hundreds of Albanians flee their country for reaching Italy, Germany, and Greece. The way the massive exodus happened indicated that communism had 'neither helped Albanians to feel closer to each other nor cultivated in them a love for their country and for communism'; but it was only used to suppress and isolate them (Lubonja, 2002: 100). The principles of Marxism-Leninism together with the heroes of communism were overthrown from their pedestals once and forever. However, the Albanians left the national heroes of the pre-communist period on the pedestals but without either believing in them or being inspired by them (Lubonja, 2002: 100).

While the other ex-communist countries of Balkans or the Eastern Europe filled the ideological vacuum with a collective identity based on national identity or by political projects like that of 'Central Europe', the Albanians felt betrayed by the communists and fell back to their past history seeking for an ally to support them. At the time, throughout the Balkans the political parties that represented nationalist ideas were taking power, but in Albania this did not occur. Henderson and Robinson suggest that even though Albania had been the most nationalist and isolationist of all the states in Europe in the 90s the country 'was surprisingly untroubled by a preoccupation with national identity-perhaps because it had too many other concerns' (1997: 247-8).

With the breakdown of the communist regime, Albania initiated a fundamental politico-economic reorientation with a massive opening to the world. Derek Hall has portrayed this politico-economic shift as one from 'isolationism' to 'flexible pragmatism' motivated by the urgency for economic and technical assistance and the will of being accepted to the world community, 'not least within the common European home' (Hall, 1994: 185). The emerging first democratic government

emphasized the prominence of building close relations with Europe and European Community, along other important international organizations and the United States.

Regarding myths, Lubonja claims that 'If we speak of one myth dominating the post-communist period, it is the myth of the West' (2002: 101). Apparently, with the West, the Western Europe and the U.S. were intended. The West appeared to be the strongest motivation for the creation of a new identity and a new aspiration, and apparently, the finding of a new ally to provide support (Lubonja, 2002: 101). Both the West and Europe were presented as the 'Promised Land', the representative of wealth and hedonistic lifestyle. They symbolized freedom, which the Albanian citizens lacked profoundly during the past authoritarian regime. For Albania of late 80's, Europe was the continent of luxury, which represented a hedonistic life style and provided a constant seducement to people living in misery (Nano, 2002: 12).

Seen from another point of view, in the early 1990s the myth of the West was regarded as a threat to the national unity since the members of the depressed Albanian society instead of working for integrating their country in Europe, left Albania and attempted at being integrated to Europe individually. Thus, rather than serving for keeping Albanians united and motivated in their country the myth of the West served to attract Albanians to the Western World (Lubonja, 2002: 102). Moreover, the West and Europe did not bring a culture based on religion or history of the past, but rather a culture based on democratic values and pluralism, which only recently are being institutionalized in Albania. All these reasons and the slow pace of Europe at integrating Albania are suggested to have a strong effect on the waning of what Lubonja calls the 'the myth of the West'.

On contrary, Mustafa Nano and Piro Misha seem to be very critical to the claimed mythical imagination of Albanians about Europe. In their view, the conceptualization of Europe is more complex than simply a myth, since Europe had been regarded as hostile, distrustful, immoral and the source of many injustices committed to Albania, throughout the contemporary national history (Nano, 2002; Misha, 1997). The reason of the hostility lies on the unresolved 'Albanian question' for which Europe is hold

responsible as it allowed the partition of Albanian territories among neighbouring countries (Nano, 2002). Nano maintains that, Europe of the post-Cold War was the same of that of early twentieth century with respect to its approach towards Albania, with the only difference that now Albania was so in need that it could not blame her (Nano, 2002: 17). Thus, the conceptualization of the 'Europe' and the 'West' by the Albanian scholars and intellectuals happened to be a complex and multi-facet portrayal.

In order to grasp the developments taking place in the post-communist Albania it is substantive to understand the political spectrum of the country. For this purpose in the following section the present political dynamics of Albania and the challenges that the first 'democratic' governments was faced with, are presented shortly. Strong references are made to the behaviour and attitude of the emerging political elite and the functioning of democracy.

### 3.2. The Dynamics of Post-Communist Politics

The prolonged communist control and the severe economic conditions of the 1980s created strong anti-communist sentiments among Albanians. The fall of the Ceausescu regime in Romania proved to be decisive for the destiny of the country's totalitarian regime, whose authority was propped up by the national *Securitate*, known as *Sigurimi* in Albania (Ágh, 1998b: 287). In 1990, APL's resistance to change caused a great deal of instability and dissatisfaction, which led to widespread anarchy. Consequently, the leaders of APL in order to avoid mass violence opted to adopt a reformist program and to break up with the Marxist-Leninist program. Evidently, it was too little and too late by then. Ramiz Alia's decision of December 1990, to permit the creation of other political parties built a totally new environment for the Albanian Party of Labor (Biberaj, 1999: 82).

The regime change was the product of the mass dissatisfaction about tough and repressive regime that was manifested in two main ways. The first was the mass protest of Albanian people seeking 'freedom' and 'democracy' that reached its peak

in December 1990 in students' movement, and was finalized by the pronouncement of the government on introducing political pluralism. The second one was produced by the massive exodus of July 1990 when more than a hundred people entered the foreign embassies in Tirana and searched a way out of the rough situation created in the country (see Biberaj, 1999). The dramatic picture of people leaving their country in that way was the clear expression of the sublime opposition of Albanians to the communist dictatorship.

In the aftermath of 1991 with the demise of communist regime, Albania, as the other countries of Eastern and Central Europe, experienced fundamental political changes that pushed the country to the road of democracy. The so-called triple transition paradigm, used to explain the post-communist transitions, seems to be helpful at also elucidating the transformation that Albania passed through. Firstly, Albania abandoned its isolationist policies and initiated an irreversible political opening to the world. Secondly, a transition from a centrally planned to a market economy started and it is still going on. Thirdly, there was a transformation from an authoritarian communist regime to democracy. As generally accepted, the challenges Albania is going through in its post-communist history are to a great extent bounded to the multiple transitions the country is experiencing simultaneously. Democratization in Albania happened to be a complicated process with a late start and many impediments since the maturity of Albanian totalitarian regime, and its absolute isolation from the rest of the world, has left behind a historical legacy, which is difficult to overcome (Ágh, 1998a: 180).

Since 1991, the political-economic system and the society in Albania has changed so much that communism remained a bad dream and a distant fact. The change started with the formation of the Democratic Party (DP) in 1990, by a group of courageous intellectuals and students who imagined a better future for Albania. The DP emerged as the first and the main political opposition power since 1940s. The Democratic Party, led by Sali Berisha, in its early program highlighted its commitment to individual freedom, institutionalization of democracy, transition to a free-market economy, political pluralism, rule of law, and respect for human rights. The

Democrats presented a very radical program for rapid transition in all spheres of life and declared that in fulfilling their program the U.S., Europe and other international organizations would assist them financially. They also emphasized the great role of European Union and the United States in the process of transition as major models and partners.

Democratic Party emerged as a centre-right wing party in the political spectrum of Albania. Initially, the DP followers had nothing in common except the deep dissatisfaction about the communist regime and the wish of challenging it. The Democrats gained the admiration and the support of a group of dissidents and former political prisoners who made up the community that suffered most during the Enverist regime. However, because of the fear that the communists could oppress the opposition at any time, and doubtful of the radical program of rapid transition that this party presented, the Democratic Party could not win a massive support during the 1991. In general, the democrats in their election campaigns reflected on promises that democracy, freedom, market economy, and human rights would be established in Albania as fast as an eye blink after DP's coming to power. Indeed, this encouraged suspicion among the pragmatic Albanians who feared a new political collapse.

In the aftermath of the failure of the first coalition government led by APL, which came out of the first multi-party and 'free' elections of 1991, the unsatisfied masses began supporting the DP as the only chance for altering the situation. APL attempts to redefine itself by the implementation of some slight reforms, which reoriented it towards European social democratic parties, and were accompanied by the changing of the party's name to 'The Socialist Party' (SP). In their essence, these reforms were unsuitable for confronting the challenges that the new post-communist political and economic system necessitated. As imagined, the Socialist Party during the early 90's suffered profoundly from the burden of the communism and the heritage of APL. This was openly witnessed in the continuous clashes between the Socialists and the frustrated masses in the 1990-1992 period. Even though this period was not as violent as in Yugoslavia or Romania still its violence exceeded the levels of Bulgaria

because 'both the government and the masses had much less democratic experience' (Ágh, 1998b: 288-9).

In March 1992 elections, the Democratic Party ousted the communists from power and a new government was formed. Sali Berisha was elected as the president of the republic, the first non-communist president of Albania in the last 45 years. The victory of the Democrats was presented as a great event and a turning point for the Albanian history. After winning a clear popular mandate for reform, the DP moved promptly to fill the political vacuum created during the period of turmoil (Biberaj, 1999: 149). The precedence of the new government consisted on arresting country's further economic decline, restoring law, and order with priority to institution building, and reintegrating the nation into the international environment after the prolonged isolation (Bibera, 1999: 149). The new government favored a shock therapy by introducing free-market economy mechanisms and privatization policies, which would reconstruct the economy in a short period. In the new age, the Democratic Party was in support of the idea of Albania's returning to the international arena seeking its inclusion in European security arrangements and integration stream. To this regard, the policies started by the Democratic government in 1992 did not seem different from the post-communist reforms going on in the other parts of Eastern and Central Europe since 1989, despite the fact that the outcome proved to be different.

Since 1991 many other political parties were formed in Albania but they never had the chance to play any significant role in national politics because of the dominance of the political arena by two major parties, namely the SP and the DP. Actually, the Republican Party, which was a conservative democratic party that operated parallel with the DP in the early years of transition, initially carried a great potential of emerging as the third great party and challenging both the SP and DP. However, its leaders were affirmed to have close ties with the communists, whereas its Chairman, Sabri Godo, was accused of being an agent of *Sigurimi* (Biberaj, 1999: 70). Unfortunately, the Republican Party never collected enough votes at the elections and its role in Albanian politics diminished with time. Democratic Alliance was

another promising party, which was born as a Democratic Party split, formed by some liberal ex-democrats who left Democratic Party pushed by Berisha's extremist attitude towards communists and his rightist tendencies. In addition, other parties like the Agrarian, Democratic Christian, National Unity, the Union for Human Rights, and the Social Democratic parties were formed during the early 1990s together with the organization OMONIA, which represented the ethnic Greek community of Albania. These marginal parties continue playing a minor role in the Albanian political arena.

Apparently, legacies of communism impeded the development of democracy, rule of law and market economy in many aspects. This happened because Albania had hardly inherited any democratic tradition from the communism, during which there was no practice of the human rights, whereas the Ministry of Justice was abolished since the 1960 (Biberaj, 1999:71). Kajsiu, Bumçi and Rakipi described the legacy of Albania's communist regime in the following aspects: a complete isolation that divided Albania for half a century even from the other communist bloc countries; official paranoia and propaganda of external enemies; Stalinization of the country in that it eliminated all of the liberal political elite; an extremely totalitarian regime; abolition of all forms of private property; very harsh political persecution; and the creation of the Communist New Man.<sup>8</sup>

As generally suggested, mainly due to the lack of a democratic tradition, the new ruling party did not prove to remain loyal to the principles of democracy and political pluralism. Once in power, the Democrats had spent their energy on sending the ex-communists and the members of politburo to jail under the charges for misuse of power. Actually, they had shown their uncompromising approach towards the Socialists in 1991 by refusing to play a loyal position in the coalition government, when they used their popularity 'to bring the Communists to their knees' (Biberaj, 1999: 157).

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<sup>8</sup> Kajsiu, B., Bumçi, A., & Rakipi, R. (2003). 'Albania- a Weak Democracy a Weak State'. *The Inflexibility Trap Frustrated Societies, Weak States and Democracy*. Centre for Liberal Strategies Institute for Market Economics.



Since the beginning, the DP supported the Albanian national question and the 'Kosovo cause' and used these issues for winning the discourse over the Socialists who had neglected the problem for decades. A belief that the Albanian government never did anything during communism to penalize the Yugoslav government for the denial of Albanian national rights in Yugoslavia, or to promote the unification of all Albanians, was popular among Kosovars (Vickers & Pettifer, 1999: 142). However, in the early 1990s the APL itself began demanding that Albanians of Yugoslavia be given the same rights as the other people of that country. It was the time when political leaders and intellectuals from Kosovo kept asserting that Albania ought to help Kosovo cause by making it heard to the entire world through Albanian media, since the Kosovars had no media access.

Benefiting from the lack of trust Kosovars had on SP, the Democratic Party associated itself decisively with the Kosovo cause claiming that once in power it would bring the 'Balkan Wall' down (Vickers & Pettifer, 1999: 150). Instigated by the promises of the Albanian Democratic Party, Kosovars mobilized their émigré communities for creating funds for the newly emerging Albanian Democratic Party since they strongly believed that the Democrats would help them resolving their issue. The championing of Kosovo issue assured the DP the support of Albanian diaspora, which owns a powerful and wealthy lobby, especially in New York. The Kosovars believed that they were facing a particularly important historical moment for resolving the Albanian national question (Vickers & Pettifer, 1999). Even though it was an unrealistic belief, it put pressure on Albanian government for political action towards its solution.

After the victory of DP in the elections of 1992, the Albanian government kept stressing their support for Kosovo's independence. Ambiguously, in Kosovo this support was perceived as if Albania was prepared to actively participate in an army conflict in Kosovo against the Serbs, and as if it was waiting in a state of alert on its border with Kosovo (Vickers & Pettifer, 1999). Since Albania had no such an intention or energy for intervening in Kosovo and because of the fear that the neighbors and particularly the Serbs would believe that Albania was going to hit

them, the Albanian government found it necessary declaring publicly that the best way of solving the Albanian national question was by both Albania and Kosovo joining the EC together. As the Kosovar elite understood that any prospect of Albanian territorial unification would bring instability to the region and would harm the future of Albanians in Europe, they gave up discussing about any unification, which in reality in Albania was never considered. Berisha turned its attention and energy away from Kosovo after he realized that the country was in desperate economic conditions, which inflicted the need for foreign aid and investments (Vickers & Pettifer, 1999: 160).

The victory of the Democrats, once presented as the beginning of a new era for Albanian history, was an important historical opportunity for constructing a democratic future and separating the country from its authoritarian past. Given that in the 1992 there existed a high public support for reforms and changes, the situation could be used by the Democrats to construct a unification of society and social integration by highlighting democratic values, civil rights and liberties (Açar, 2000: 56). However, that opportunity was missed and in the mid-1990s the country started looking like a new totalitarian regime with a 'new dictator', Sali Berisha. The president increasingly manifested authoritarian leadership features, and concentrated enormous power to his position, which turned him into a highly 'anti-democratic' politician. As Ágh suggests 'with such a concentration of power, it is difficult to begin a democratic transition (1998b: 292).

Once in power the democrats had filled almost all of the state positions with their followers, which brought to a high level of politicization of the state apparatus. However, by 1994, the government' increased harassment of the press, its clear influence over the judiciary system, and issues of governmental accountability and transparency provided signs of Democrats' backtracking from their commitment to democracy (Biberaj, 1999: 161). Also, Berisha's control over the executive domain and the confusion regarding the institutional prerogatives had a negative effect on Albanian developments (Biberaj, 1999: 168). The failure to pass the draft constitution in a popular referendum, which was seen as a means of strengthening the

position of the president, was a clear indication of Berisha's and the democrats' decreasing reputation. Yet, the main reasons for the defeat of the referendum were 'economic discontent and voter anger at official corruption' (Biberaj, 1999: 175). Consequently, the constitutional structures failed to make the separation of powers and to institutionalize political pluralism. The extent to which Dr. Sali Berisha had consolidated control in the method of his ultra-communist predecessors was realized in the West after the publication of an article entitled 'Albania. Hoxha is dead, long live Berisha', in the *War Report* in 1995 (Duffy, 2000: 73).

Evidently, the DP and the SP turned out to be the (only) pillars of Albanian post-communist politics. Yet, their uncooperative character harmed severely the development of democracy and western-style politics in Albania. Açar, while referring to the relations of the Albanian Democratic and Socialist Parties after the 1992 elections, he claims that, 'the supremacy of one party in the parliament, while neglecting the other in the legislation and execution process, and with the other's uncooperative approach due to exclusion and protest of the ruling party began to shape the daily politics' (2000: 46). Before the 1996 elections, which proved to be a real catastrophe for Albanian democracy, the two main parties were more hostile than ever to each other. The election campaign occurred in a general atmosphere of high political tension. The intolerant mentality of Democrats, who feared the loss of power, was evident in their anticommunist campaigns while they charged the former communists of fraud, and corruption, for which there was little or no evidence.<sup>9</sup>

However, given that the irregularities reached a great extent, many opposition parties led by the Socialists abandoned the elections some hours before the polling ended, by claiming that they would not accept the results of the election and would not recognize the new parliament (Biberaj, 1999: 298). The international bodies, which observed the election process, identified many irregularities. An observer of CSCE (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe) reported to the Commission that the 1996 Albanian elections have proven to be perhaps 'the most controversial

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<sup>9</sup> Elbasani, A. (2004), *Democratization Process in Albania: Manipulation or Appropriation of International Norms*, p.17. <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/kokkalis/GSW%206/elbasani.pdf>

election held in recent times in this region of the world'.<sup>10</sup> According to Duffy, the Albanian elections of May 1996 highlighted the resilience of the communist heritage in the most Stalinist country of Europe (2000: 74).

Despite of the pressure some European institutions and the U.S. put on the government for repeating the elections, the DP enthusiastically celebrated the victory and insisted on the regularity of the elections. Berisha regime needed this victory for reaching the two-thirds majority, which would make possible that the Democratic Party pass its version of Constitution and re-elect Berisha as the president of the country (Ágh, 1998b: 294). The Democrats, who denounced the boycott of the opposition, continued viewing the Socialist Party as 'an unreformed party and a dangerous threat to the country's fledging democracy (Biberaj, 1999: 299).

The political turmoil of 1996 deepened by the scandal of the collapse of pyramid investment schemes of early 1997, in which Albanians lost a remarkable amount of money. The investment schemes were a way to which many companies applied for assuring their financial needs by offering high interest rates to investors, where the interest rates grew up as the competition between these companies increased. In short time these kinds of investments took the form of pyramid where the next investor used to pay the interest on the deposits of the first. These get-rich-quick schemes had been operating since 1991, but in 1996 they had expanded hugely after offering impossibly high return rates, so that their bankruptcy was evident. They had flourished mainly due to the government's delay on banking reform and the urgent demand for credit for the emerging private sector (Whitehead, 1999: 191).

After their official collapse in 1997, the masses blamed the government for allowing and tolerating the pyramid schemes and denounced it for being a part of the game. Actually, it was generally believed that the pyramid schemes were used for money laundering and that 'links existed between the political figures and the organized crime organizations' (Açar, 2000: 77). The situation was getting out of the control by

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<sup>10</sup> CSCE, *The Albanian Parliamentary Elections of 1996*. <http://www.csce.gov/pdf/o61896.pdf>

the hundreds of thousands of Albanians who began protesting on the streets firstly against these fraudulent investment schemes and later against Berisha regime. Later on, the Parliament approved a law, which demanded a transparent investigation of the main pyramid companies (Whitehead, 1999: 196). But it was too little since by the early March 1997 the protest reached to the dimensions of a real civil war where the public order and state control totally collapsed. As a response to this, on March 2, the Parliament declared a state of emergency. West European countries expressed their concern about the state of emergency as it could be probably used by Berisha to suppress the opposition and to strengthen the authoritarian rule (Biberaj, 1999: 323). As the politico-economic crisis became unmanageable, for the first time, Berisha asked for cooperation with the opposition aiming at finding ways of getting the country out of the situation. Even though he promised new elections the Socialists did not accept to cooperate until the Democratic government resigned in March 1997. A temporary government of National Reconciliation was established led by Bashkim Fino, a Socialist from Southern Albania, by whom Berisha aimed to sooth the situation in the wealthy South. Southern Albania, concentrated in Vlorë, was the region that lost most in the fraudulent pyramid schemes. According to Biberaj, Berisha committed an 'error of political strategy' by dropping the Democrat Prime Minister Meksi and seeking compromise with the opposition (1999: 322). This error would force him to cooperate with the Socialists 'in a way he had eschewed in the past' (1999: 322).

During the 1997 crisis, which in the memory of the Albanians remained as the 'War', Europe assisted Albania to a considerable extent. For mediating between the uncooperative political forces in Albania and for assisting the crisis personally, the representative of OSCE, Dr. Franz Vranitzky came to Albania in March 1997. He called the government and the opposition for consensus and cooperation, and stated the imperative necessity of the creation of a new political climate for calming the situation (Biberaj, 1999). Also, under the leadership of Italy, which was the West European country most affected by the crisis in Albania, a Multinational Protection Force was established and then deployed in Albania. However, these forces remained utterly passive and the ordinary Albanians were surprised by the multinational force,

which 'stood by idly while criminal, armed gangs continued to terrorize the civilian population' (Biberaj, 1999: 327).

What happened during the 1997 seriously harmed the credibility of Albanians to the Democratic Party and to the state institutions in general. The Albanian Democratic Party could not get rid of the totalitarian legacy since during their rule, the DP took full powers in the government apparatus and established the personal rule of Berisha (Ágh, 1998a: 185). All these events led to socio-economic crisis and political instability that called for new elections. Beryl Nicholson has described the effects of the events of 1997 in Albania as pushing 'the communist period further back into history' and making the post-communist era more differentiated and to lose the feeling of unreality it had in the early years (1999: 564-5).

A polarized political atmosphere dominated as generally by the antagonism of Socialists and Democrats accompanied the country throughout the next general elections that were held in May 1997. The Socialist leader, Fatos Nano who got out from the prison<sup>11</sup>, in the electoral campaign tried to win over then Democrats by promising that if SP wins, it would compensate the losses of the pyramid schemes. However, the political parties, in order to prevent any failure in the elections, opted to form election alliances rather than run for single party's victory. Conversely, in the same elections the Albanian citizens confronted a possibility of the restoring of the monarchy since the King Leka Zogu I<sup>12</sup> turned back home after a long missing period. Nonetheless, the Albanians voted against the monarchy.

The victory of the Socialist coalition in the 1997 elections was represented as a second chance for Albania to initiate a successful transition towards liberal democracy and market economy. Berisha regime was swept away and Fatos Nano became the new Prime Minister, the central figure of the following regime. The

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<sup>11</sup> Fatos Nano was arrested in July 1993 under the accusation of misappropriation of funds during his period as Prime Minister in 1991-1992. Nano had rejected the charges and claimed that Berisha was trying to liquidate his political opponents. Actually, in Albania it was generally believed that the arrest was politically motivated.

<sup>12</sup> Leka Zogu is the son of the King Zogu who governed Albania through 1924- 1939 period of time.

second round of democratizations which started in mid 90s in Albania as elsewhere in the Balkans, was a necessity since in these countries no real systemic change occurred up until 1996-97, but just facade or formalistic democracies were created in diverse ways (Ágh, 1998a: 185-6). The new coalition government aimed at the normalization of the situation in the country, restoring the public order and collecting the weapons, the civil population acquired from the opening of military depots in early 1997. During the post-crisis period, the goal of the new government remained the enhancement of social and political stability and the economic recovery. The new coalition government introduced new reforms in decentralization, privatization and tax system for increasing the state revenues. On the other hand, Nano did not neglect institutionalizing his position and removing the Democrats from public offices.

Despite its internal problems and the divisive political scene, Albania continued showing its positive contribution in the regional conflicts. Particularly the Kosovo crisis in 1999 provoked an enormous flow of Kosovar refugees into Albania, reaching a number of 500,000<sup>13</sup>, which were assisted by the Albanian government. In this sense, many foreign personalities as the general secretary of NATO, Javier Solana, appraised the work and the way the Albanian government handled with the difficult situation in the region.<sup>14</sup>

The domestic political situation ameliorated slightly only after the return of opposition to the parliament in July 1999, after the long boycott. The creation of a constructive atmosphere between the main parties was enabled after the formation of some bi-partisan (ruling party-opposition) Parliamentary Commission to deal with sensitive issues like elections, private property or Euro-Atlantic integration that required large political support.<sup>15</sup> More dialogue was realized between the ruling party and the opposition but, ironically, an internal crisis appeared inside the

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<sup>13</sup> European Commission. *Albania: Country Strategy Paper 2002-2006*.  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/sec/albania/csp/02\\_06\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/sec/albania/csp/02_06_en.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> *Shekulli*, 20 Gusht 1999. (The Century- an independent Albanian daily paper).

<sup>15</sup> Commission of the European Community. *Albania: Stabilization and Association Report 2003*.  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/sec/SAP/rep2/com03\\_339\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/sec/SAP/rep2/com03_339_en.pdf)

Socialist Party between two major divisions represented by the chairman, Fatos Nano and the ex-premiere, Ilir Meta. The conflict between the two leaders intensified after the 2001 elections, which were not recognized by the opposition and criticized by international organizations, although they were accepted. Despite the fact that during the election campaign of the Socialist Party, Meta was represented as the future premiere of the Socialists, after that the Socialist coalition came to power, Nano challenged Meta's candidacy. The crisis was intensified after that Meta won by a majority in the Socialist structures, and Nano raised corruption and dilettantist accuses against Meta. The conflicts between Nano and Meta invoked the mediation of European personalities for assisting at resolving the disputes. The European Union decided to send to Tirana the EU security and foreign policy envoy, Javier Solana, but, the mission was cancelled when it was realized it would be the first time that an EU diplomat interfered to the internal politics of a country potential candidate for EU membership.<sup>16</sup>

As is generally accepted in academic discussion, democracy necessitates a strong multiparty political system and free and fair elections. Since the Albanian elections have not yet assured their fairness and regularity and given that so far the Albanian politics has been confrontational and uncooperative, it is acceptable to say that the Albanian democracy is still at serious threat. A legitimacy crisis for the Socialist rule is taking place on the behalf of the protracted political crisis, contested elections which have been combined with weak institutions, deteriorating economic conditions and high level of unemployment.<sup>17</sup>

As elsewhere in Eastern and Central Europe, the regime change and the processes of democratic transition have been party dominated in Albania as well. Instead of promoting the development of democracy in the country, the Albanian political parties are becoming a real impediment to democracy with their continuous crises, which are caused mainly by the personal rivalry of the political class. Yet, after

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<sup>16</sup> Leka, A. (2001) *Political crisis in Tirana causes international concern*.  
<http://www.aimpress.ch/dyn/trac/archive/data/200112/11225-005-trac-tir-htm>

<sup>17</sup> Kajsiu, Bumçi, Rakipi, (2003). *Op.cit.*, p. 123.



thirteen years of transition to democracy the politics is made through 'charismatic leaders' in an environment lacking genuine participatory institutions and democratic patterns of political culture.

## CHAPTER 4

### ALBANIA AND EU RELATIONS

Throughout this chapter, first the contractual Albanian relations with the EU are discussed in the framework of Stabilization and Association Process, and then the impact of EU conditionality on the country is shown. In the second section the European Union's perceptions on Albania are presented with strong reference to what remain the greatest challenges of Albanian governments, literally, organized crime and corruption.

#### 4.1. Albania: on the way to Europe

In the early 1990s, the desire for a 'return to Europe' was explicitly demonstrated by the massive anti-communist protests guided by the slogan, 'We want Albania as the rest of Europe'. Given the example the Central and Eastern European countries followed towards European Union, Albania on its road towards democracy, increasingly viewed the EU as a unique means for geopolitical and economic integration in the international environment. Albania's development of strategic relationships with the EU pointed to the fact the EU was 'the primary locus for Albania's external relations and its strategy for managing transition and integration into global economic and political structures' (Johnson, 2001: 175).

The Central and Eastern Eurobarometer indicates that the Albanians share the most favourable images of European Union among the other countries participating in the survey: 58% hold that Albania benefits from the relations with EU, and 44% see their future primarily linked to the EU as compared to 23% in Bulgaria<sup>18</sup>. Another recent study conducted in Albania by the Albanian Institute for International Studies with

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<sup>18</sup> *Central and Eastern Eurobarometer*.  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/public\\_opinion/archives/ceeb/ceeb6/ceeb6\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/archives/ceeb/ceeb6/ceeb6_en.htm)

representatives from media, NGO-s, business groups and public officials concluded that in a possible referendum regarding the accession of Albania into EU, 98.31% would vote in favour of the membership.<sup>19</sup>

The assertion of EU membership has been a top priority of all post-communist Albanian governments, particularly since 1997 after the first wave of democratic transition failed. The uncertain economic development, political volatility and the lack of foreign assistance and investments have made Albania increasingly dependent on European Union and its assistance. Given the decrease of U.S. commitment to the Balkans, the EU has become for the Balkan countries 'the only game in town'.<sup>20</sup> From the beginning, it was evident that the political and economic integration to EU and the prospect for membership would be reached after the fulfillment of certain conditions and criteria set by EU bodies. As Anastasakis and Bechev argue, EU conditionality is the most powerful tool for dealing with the candidate and potential candidate countries, which aims at promoting reform in the Balkans, prescribing criteria for EU-granted benefits, and differentiating 'among countries by asserting each on its own merits'.<sup>21</sup>

Given that the EU and other major international bodies enjoy high credibility among the Albanian citizens whose common wish is a rapid integration, reforms at home, which are a prerequisite for European integration, are legitimized by these international institutions, primarily the EU. This credibility among the Albanian people forces the domestic politicians to obey the EU rules and conditions, as far as they want to stay in power. As Elbasani carefully notes, the EU membership is among the few issues where the domestic politics overcome their legacy of divisiveness and turn to the real issue at hand, which consists on 'progress of reforms

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<sup>19</sup> Rakipi, A., & Bumçi, A. (2003). *Shqipëria dhe Bashkimi Europian: Përfytyrime dhe Realitete*. Albanian Institute for International Studies.

<sup>20</sup> Anastasakis, O. & Bechev, D. (2003). *EU Conditionality in South East Europe: Bringing Commitment to the Process*. p.4.  
<http://www.cespi.it/STOCCHIERO/dossierBalceni/conditionality.PDF>

<sup>21</sup> Anastasakis & Bechev, (2003). Op.cit., p.3.

closely related to Europeanization project'.<sup>22</sup> When the democratic institutions carry little consensus, they are violated by the political elite and carry limited credibility, the legitimacy of these institutions remains in the international community rather than on the democratic processes and rules.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, in many moments of internal political crisis when the national political elite could not manage to bring consensual solutions to the problems, the international bodies, primarily EU, tend to say the last word. Given the turbulent experiences that Albania passed through, it is not surprising to say that the Albanian society trusts the European institutions more than it trusts the domestic ones.

Looking at the formal Albania-EU relations it can be seen that they have been increasingly formalized with the development of contractual relationships between the two in political, economic, security and assistance fields. The diplomatic relations with EU were institutionalized after signing in May 1992, the Agreement of Economic Cooperation and Trade (AECT), an initially non-preferential agreement which is still in force. With AECT Albania became eligible for funding under the PHARE programme for accomplishing economic reforms. PHARE, which was initially designed for Hungary and Poland, gave a considerable assistance to Albania in 1992-1996 time period ranking Albania among the countries that benefited most from this program. European Union became in these years the only donor to Albania, which granted through the PHARE programme about \$ 511.1 million only during 1991-1996 (Milo, 2003: 8).

The economic and trade cooperation was furthered in October 1999 by the EU's offering on autonomous bases, other marketing concessions and abolishing taxes for most Albanian exports. In September 2000, marketing concessions have improved more from another package deal of marketing preferences offered by EU to Albania.<sup>24</sup> In the early 1995, Albania officially requested the opening of the

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<sup>22</sup> Elbasani, A. (2004). Op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> Elbasani, A. (2004). Op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> Meksi, E. (2003). 'The Albanian Dimension of Integration', *Negotium*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania.

negotiations for an association agreement with the EU, relying on the fact that such an agreement was offered to Bulgaria and Romania. An evaluation carried out by the EU Commission 'on the possibilities of free marketing of the merchandise, services and capitals in Albania, concluded that a "classic" Agreement as those that most countries have with the EU about their membership, would be a premature step for Albania'.<sup>25</sup> In the following year European Council of Ministers asked the Commission to compile a proposal for a '*sui-generis*' agreement (non-association agreement) with Albania that would strengthen the relations between the country and the Union. However, the divisive elections of May 1996, together with the deep socio-economic crisis of 1997 caused by the collapse of pyramidal schemes, delayed a possible further development of relations between Albania and the EU.

In 1997, the EU launched towards the Western Balkans the Regional Approach strategy that established 'political and economic conditionality' for EU's relations with these countries (Johnson, 2001: 175). In the aftermath of the instability in the region created by the Kosovo crisis of 1999 the bilateral Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) and the multilateral Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe replaced the former Regional Approach. The high tensions between the Serbs and the Kosovars demonstrated to Europe that if it would continue neglecting the Balkans, the conflict would rapidly spread over to Europe. Because of this necessity, the EU emerged in the Balkans as an agency guiding and evaluating the political reforms in the framework of regional approach. The Stability Pact focused on regional cooperation in the political, economic and security fields facilitated by the assistance of main international actors. This EU initiative was acting as a catalyst for reforms and the development in the region by means of providing the coordinating mechanisms and the suitable political terrain in which the reforms can be accelerated and a regional perspective to the problems would develop (Perretti, 2000: 35).

The Stabilization and Association Process, which was designed to run parallel to the Stability Pact, aimed to deepen the EU relations with the individual countries of Western Balkans, namely Albania, FYROM (Former-Yugoslav Republic of

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<sup>25</sup> Meksi, E. (2003). Op. cit., p. 19.

Macedonia), Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro. The goal of SAP was to sign Stabilization Association Agreements with each individual country, which were modelled according to European Agreements. In the framework of the SAP, European Commission presented to Albania in 1999 a Feasibility Report in which it was concluded that 'despite progress made since 1997 crisis, Albania was not yet in a position to take on far reaching contractual obligations with the EU'.<sup>26</sup> In order to enhance this process, Albania was asked to comply with some preconditions falling into these areas: 'the strengthening of the public order and security in the country, governance improvement, law enforcement, continuation of the macroeconomic stability, and acceleration of structural reforms' (Milo, 2003: 10).

At Santa Maria da Feira Council held in June 2000 the EU entered into a new era regarding the relations with South Eastern Europe. In this summit, the status of SAP countries as 'potential candidates' for EU membership, and the goal of EU to fully integrate these countries into its economic and political mainstream was stated clearly. This was undoubtedly a progress of the Western Balkan countries towards Europe, despite the fact that the summit did not draw a clear link between these countries and EU membership. Since then the progress of Albania-EU relations from trade cooperation to conditional bilateral relations and the perspective for a Stabilization Association Agreement became Albania's greater motivator in its difficult road towards democracy and political pluralism.

The following EU meeting, the Zagreb Summit of November 2000, aimed at clarifying the involvements with each country participating in the SAP, by gaining the region's agreement to a comprehensible set of objectives and conditions. At this point, the true conditionality of EU over the Western Balkans was enforced as in the case of Central and Eastern European countries. 'The strategy to integrate the Balkans borrows from the toolkit the Union had developed to integrate other post-communist countries'.<sup>27</sup> The EU offered a prospect of accession on the basis of the

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<sup>26</sup> European Commission. *Albania Country Report Strategy Paper 2002-2006*. [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/sec/albania/csp/02\\_06\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/sec/albania/csp/02_06_en.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Elbasani, A. (2004). Op.cit., p. 18.

Treaty on European Union, the 1993 Copenhagen criteria, and an assistance programme to support the reforms, CARDS, which replaced the former PHARE programme. In return, the countries of the region agreed to abide to EU's conditionality and participate fully in the Stabilization and Association Process.<sup>28</sup>

In the Summit, the EU decided to intensify the cooperation with Albania through setting up a High Level Steering Group. The purpose of this group was to identify and support the reforms required and asserting Albania's capacities for fulfilling the obligations for a Stabilization Associations Agreement. The EU-Albania steering committee was asked to report to the Council by mid-2001 the concluding observation. After the report was completed, the Commission, after taking into the account the political, economic, regional, and SAA-related technical factors, concluded that it was appropriate continuing with a Stabilization and Association Agreement. The General Affairs Council of EU asked the Commission to present a draft mandate for opening negotiations with Albania before the end of 2001. However, the negotiations for a Stabilization Association Agreement with Albania were not opened before January 31, 2003. The President of European Commission, Mr. Romano Prodi, who officially opened the negotiations for the SAA with Albania, highlighted country's status of a potential candidate for EU membership, and the obligations deriving from the bilateral agreement in the SAP framework. Prodi assured the Albanian government that the Commission would be a partner during the negotiations and would help the Albanian party having a better understanding of the process and passing over the different difficulties.<sup>29</sup> This event was represented by the Albanian political class and media as the most important moment of Albania-EU relations and as a great success for Albania.

Because no date of accession was given neither to Albania nor to any country involved in SAP, the Albanian politicians try to maintain the EU credibility high at

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<sup>28</sup> European Commission. Op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> 'The speech of Mr. Romano Prodi, President of EU, held at the official ceremony of the opening of the talks for the SAA'. *Negotium*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania (2003).

both elite and public level since it is believed that high credibility to EU increases the chances for successful reforms. Johnson claims that, the unwillingness of the EU to set a clear calendar for its eastern enlargement would further delay the Balkan rapprochement to the EU (2001:192). This would stem from the South Eastern European countries' thought that phrases like 'potential member' or 'perspective on full integration' are only rhetorics EU invented to direct them along institutional paths dictated by itself (Johnson, 2001: 192). For this purpose, it would be better if the countries of South Eastern Europe were ensured that the initiatives like Stability Pact or SAP are not replacements for membership, and that EU membership would come firmly at the end of these processes. As suggested by Johnson, the regional integration promoted through the Stability Pact should be closely linked to the EU enlargement, so that the people of Balkans are not taken out of the enlargement for so long (2001: 192).

The EU emerged as the major player in Albania in tough times when there existed little trust in the changing governments, state institutions, and state capacity, and when little internal motivation for reform existed. European Commission expressed that the SAP was initiated with Albania mainly after it recognized that,

... the main motivators for the reforms relating to respect for the rule of law, democratic and stable institutions and development of a market economy is a relationship with the EU that is based on a credible prospect of membership once the relevant conditions have been met.<sup>30</sup>

The fact that there would be no compromise regarding early membership to EU, was clearly expressed at the Thessalonica Summit held in June 2003, where it was stated that the negotiations for SAA would continue as long as the individual participant countries need to fulfil the reforms and obligations set by the EU. At the summit, the Commissioner Chris Patten put it this way:

The membership perspective is real and the map of the EU will be considered completed after the admission of the West Balkan countries to the EU. The

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<sup>30</sup> European Commission. Op.cit.



EU will do its best to help the region towards success. ... But the membership to the EU should be merited, and to this end it is required a great work and the political will of government officials in the region.<sup>31</sup>

The EU officials highlight the phrase that 'the EU membership should be merited' for guaranteeing the continuation of the reforms in the South Eastern Europe, and for excluding the risk that these countries expect unprecedented membership, as actually Albania has been seeking.

Evidently, Albania is not at a condition to oppose the EU conditionality even though increasingly the political elite laments about the hard conditions the EU puts on Albanian government. The Albanian Minister of European Integration claims that the negotiation process with EU is a two-way process where both parts are responsible for the developments and not only the Albanian party.<sup>32</sup> Actually, the European Union is not only a model and a goal for Albania, but it is also an agency that finances the Albanian reforms and programs for managing post-communist transition. In this way, the wish for joining EU in the shortest time dictates that Albania spends great efforts at fulfilling the conditions set by Europe. The prospect for the signing of a SAA with EU 'acts as a catalyst for concrete changes, which are identified from the EU/Albania High Level Steering Group, are reported by the Commission and checked upon from the EU/Albania Consultative Task Force'.<sup>33</sup> Through the monitoring mechanisms, European Commission follows the progress in the implementation of the reforms and identifies the main weaknesses and technical adaptations required by Albania. In the last general evaluation for the Stabilization and Association process European Commission concluded that,

Albania should pay particular attention to the Justice and Home Affairs sector if it is to make meaningful progress in the Stabilization and Association process (SAP). Some improvements have been noticed in controlling illegal

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<sup>31</sup> *European*. Ministria e Integritimit European, Nr. 1. 2004 p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Ballkan, 9 Janar 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Elbasani, A. (2004). Op. cit., p. 19.

migration towards the EU, but trafficking in human beings, drugs and other forms of organized crime, as well as corruption in key areas such as the judicial system, customs and police, remain matters of deep concern. Improvements in the judiciary have been limited and the prosecution of crimes poor, despite an increased numbers of detentions. Albania will only be able to address these difficult issues if there is a real commitment by the Government, the Albanian political forces and the law enforcement bodies (including the prosecution office and the judiciary), and full determination to translate that commitment into action.<sup>34</sup>

The above-mentioned areas where European Commission asserted serious weakness and malfunctioning remain the major field of intervention for the year 2004.

Given the desire that both the Albanian society and government exhibit for becoming a part of the 'common European family', the European Union governs and directs Albania on behalf of EU conditionality. European Commission determines the fields that require further attention and reforms, whereas the Albanian government follows the directives and tries to fulfill the conditions. Regarding the implementation of the SAP, it can be said that after 6 rounds of formal talks Albania has shown some formal improvements, which are however, not sufficient for the signing of Stabilization Association Agreement with EU. The EU party during all the meetings with the Albanian negotiation group has stated that only the ambition of Albania for signing the SAA in the shortest time possible is not enough according to the EU and its member countries.<sup>35</sup> It seems quite clear that without acceleration in the speed of the reforms, there will be no early signing of the SAA. On the other hand, Albania has still much to do for showing Europe that it is able to fulfill the conditions set by the Union.

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<sup>34</sup> Commission of the European Communities. Op.cit.

<sup>35</sup> *Marrëveshja e Asocim Stabilizimit* (2004). Albanian Institute for International Studies.

<b>Milestones of EU- Albania Relations</b>	
<b>1992</b>	Trade and Cooperation Agreement Albania becomes eligible for PHARE funding
<b>1995</b>	Albania joins European Council
<b>1997</b>	EU develops regional approach to SEE including Albania
<b>1999</b>	EU adapts a new initiative for the countries of the Western Balkans called the Stabilization and Association Process. Albania was part of it since the beginning. EU offers Albania Autonomous Trade Preferences with EU countries and duty-free access to EU markets for its products EU introduces CARDS assistance to Albania
<b>2000</b>	Fiera Summit states that all countries of SAP are potential candidates for accession in European Union. In the Zagreb meeting of SAP counties EU decides to intensify the cooperation With Albania through the establishment of the High Level Steering Group.
<b>2001</b>	First meeting on the working group of the SAP
<b>2002</b>	A Stabilization and Association Report prepares the negotiating directives for Albania
<b>2003</b>	EU officially opened negotiations with Albania for a SAA

#### 4.2. The Perceptions in European Union regarding Albania

The perceptions in Western Europe on Albania are shaped by the concerns on Albanian organized crimes since the Western European journals contain almost everyday articles on Albanian trafficking, smuggling and corruption. This sector is increasing so much that 'the stereotyping of Albanians as uniquely criminal has been accepted by many in the western police and security services which have little detailed knowledge of the region and its politics' (Pettifer, 2001: 20). Since the activities of Albanian organized crime groups affect also many Western European countries, mainly Italy, Greece and Germany, they are also of concern to EU members on these issues. The combating of organized crime is one of the most important conditions the European Commission imposes on Albania. EU demands

sustained efforts at particularly combating all types of trafficking (human beings, drugs and weapons) money laundering and the strengthening of border management policies.<sup>36</sup> As is generally accepted, the early image of Albanians as involved in organized crimes was primarily fostered by the activity of Kosovar Albanians. It is believed that the Kosovars used the illicit activity, especially drug trafficking, to fund the nationalist agenda, mainly the National Liberation Movement for Kosova.<sup>37</sup> In the drug trafficking these groups coordinated their movement with the Kosovar émigrés located in Switzerland, Paris, Brussels and Germany, which facilitated the network operations. However, with the relaxation of border controls by Albania in the aftermath of the collapse of communism many of these criminal elements entered in Albania, and within a short period of time they became the source of income for substantial segments of the population.

Derek Hall in the article 'Albania in Europe: Condemned to the Periphery or Beyond' claims that the vacuum of civil society of post-communism fed the development of organized crime which was encouraged by the need of finding alternative sources of sustenance for many Albanians (2001: 111). The collapse of pyramid investment schemes in 1997 and the conflict of Kosovo of 1999 facilitated the development of criminal activity in Albania because of the deterioration of law enforcing institutions. Also, the weak border management has made Albania a good place for the rising of 'Balkan criminality' and the drug trafficking from the Middle East to the Western Europe. Many Western organizations present the Albanian criminal groups as the greatest suppliers of heroin in Europe. These Albanian groups are thought to transport the heroin coming from Afghanistan, through Iran and Turkey, to Europe. The Albanian cartels are for the European heroin trade what the Mexican drug cartels are for the North American cocaine trade.<sup>38</sup> It is estimated that Albanian groups command 70 per cent of drugs reaching Germany and Switzerland (Cilluffo & Salmoiraghi, 1999: 23). The drug traffic is supported by Albanian

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<sup>36</sup> European Commission, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>37</sup> *The Threat posed by the Convergence of Organized Crime, Drugs Trafficking and Terrorism.* [www.russianlaw.org/Mutschke.htm](http://www.russianlaw.org/Mutschke.htm)

<sup>38</sup> *Albanian Organized Crime.* <http://glasgowcrew.tripod.com/albanian.html>

groups' Italian counterparts, including La Cosa Nostra. In order to fight drug trafficking the European Commission has asked from the Albanian party the preparation of a National Strategy for Drugs and the strengthening of the main border crossing points.

Another sector of Albanian organized crime is people smuggling, which prior to war in Kosovo was more profitable than drug smuggling and less risky (Cilluffo & Salmoiraghi, 1999: 22). In the nineties, Albania became one of the most important countries in the region for refugee and prostitution trafficking to the European Union countries. The Albanian criminal groups along Albanians, transport also Kurds and Chinese from the ports of Vlorë and Durrës to Italy. In 1999, approximately 10.000 people were smuggled into EU countries via Albania every month<sup>39</sup>, whereas last year it is believed that more than fifty people died trying to reach Italy. Child trafficking has also increased to high proportions. Child trafficking has been a part of Mafia network, which gain great amounts of money from organ transplantation and street children. One of Italy's top prosecutors, Cataldo Motta, after stating that Albanian organized crime is a point of reference for all criminal activity today; he identified the Albanian groups as a 'threat to Western society'.<sup>40</sup>

One of the factors that promotes and maintains organized crime in Albania is its close links with high political circle. It has been internationally accepted that Albanian organized crime groups are hybrid organizations, which are often involved both in criminal and in political activities. That the political class has developed strong links with the criminal and illegal activities, is indicated in the low number of people arrested or sentenced in Albania for such crimes.

The organized crime is generally fed by the weak government, lack of anti-drug legislation, poorly equipped police forces, fragile banking code and cash-based economy, which all exist in Albania (Cilluffo & Salmoiraghi, 1999: 24). An obstacle in the fight against the organized crime is the low cooperation between the judiciary

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<sup>39</sup>*The Threat posed by the Convergence of Organized Crime, Drugs Trafficking and Terrorism.* Op.cit.

<sup>40</sup> *Albanian mafia steps up people smuggling.* <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/863620.stm>

and the police forces. Many in the West have appealed for the necessity of building a stronger civil society, underpinned by the rule of law, for the cleansing of Albania from the organized crime.

Despite the organized crime, another great challenge to the newborn democracy in Albania remains corruption. The ex-minister of the interior of Albania, Ilir Gjoni, claims that corruption was actually involved in the pyramid schemes of 1997 in the sense that they were sponsored by the government in order to create the illusion of economic well-being and to persuade the electorate to support the government (2002: 34). The bankruptcy of these schemes had actually a very serious impact on Albanian economic, political and social structure, which ended up by putting at risk both the integrity and national security of Albania (Gjoni, 2002: 34). Nonetheless, in Albania there has been a substantial increase in corruption in all levels of state administration and government, which makes one think that corruption gained the status of an institution. The reason for this seems to be political insecurity and the conscience that one can occupy a state position only temporarily which fosters the involvement of public officials in corruption for increasing their private profits. Another reason for the corruption is the widespread poverty, which makes the acceptance of bribing a need. On the other side, the law enforcement agencies, which are engaged in fighting corruption and other forms of criminal activity, become exposed to corruption, and such activities turn into a vicious circle leading more and more to corrupted state officials. This happens mainly because of the lack of an established ruled-based democracy, strong and well-articulated laws, and an ethic code for government officials. The transition from one kind of political regime to another also feeds corruption in the sense that it shattered the work ethic and morality.

Another worrisome manifestation of political corruption is the financing and the sponsoring of some candidates for parliament by people involved in not-clean business (Gjoni, 2002: 38). The repercussions of such a phenomenon are translated into favouritism, appointment to important positions in administration, tax evasion and custom corruption which leads to the surpassing of state institutions, the weakening of legal businesses and the withdrawal of foreign entrepreneurs that creates an unfavourable climate for private business (Gjoni, 2002: 38). The

effectiveness of institutions that investigate economic crime and corruption like the Department of Internal Auditing has been questioned because they have been more a political instrument than an agency that monitors the governmental funding activity.<sup>41</sup> The negative impacts of corruption are seen in the relations with Europe, when EU 'took advantage of the long negotiation process of stabilization and association agreement for Albania in order to step up its criticism of the inefficiency of Albanian authorities to control and fight corruption'.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Kajsu, Bumçi, Rakipi (2003). Op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>42</sup> Kajsu, Bumçi, Rakipi (2003). Op. cit., p. 161.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN DIMENSION ON ALBANIAN POLITICS AND IDENTITY

The images of the Balkan tensions, which caused the First World War and the Balkan wars of the early twentieth century, were refreshed in the 1990s with the bloody inter-ethnic conflicts of ex-Yugoslavia. A century was enough for Europe to develop derogative stigmas and labels for the peninsula. The persistence of these images was expressed clearly in the statement of ex-foreign minister of Britain who, after the failure of his mission in Bosnia claimed that 'in the Balkans nothing is easy'<sup>43</sup>. This kind of simplicity in expression manifests the simplicity in thinking and evaluating the Balkans in general. Despite the meaning the Balkans came to have, it seems that in Albania no form of escaping from this connotation is present. This occurs because in Albania the term 'Balkans' does not have a negative meaning yet (Todorova, 1997: 32).

Since the outbreak of communist rule in the Eastern Europe it was evident that the European Community had all premises for becoming the major player in the region. However, EC experienced vast difficulties in developing an articulate policy towards its newly liberated neighbouring countries. Despite the calls for a 'united Europe' that dominated the late 80's, EC continued treating the countries of 'other Europe' as a part of the foreign relations instead of treating them as a part of the internal relations (Bideleux, 1996: 241).

More than a decade later, after European Union experienced the largest enlargement consisting of ten countries in May 2004, the southeastern Europe is still treated as a

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<sup>43</sup> Shekulli, 25 Maj 2004.



part of the external relations. It seems like the iron curtain, which used to divide Europe for half a century is gone, but a curtain still persists. It is the irony of European enlargement 'that now countries like Albania, Bulgaria and Romania are likely to join the EU via the Stabilization Pact for Southeast Europe in an earlier stage than was anticipated, 'thanks to' the reputation as troublemakers they undeservedly acquired because of Yugoslavia (Detrez, 2003: 91). As generally suggested the Western media, which focused on the Balkans at time of war and forgot them at time of peace, mainly fostered the negative representations of the region. Because of this, the history of Balkans in transition to post-communism happened to be more a history of the past than a history of the future.

Motivated by the wish for a rapid EU integration, and seduced by the great economic and political incentives offered by the Union, Albania manifests all the attempts for getting included into Europe. Given that the role of Europe and EU in the Albanian politics and cultural rhetorics are far-reaching, it is necessary to focus on politics to disclose the repercussion of this impact. In order to put more light on these on the impact of European enlargement on Albania, the Albanian political discourse on Europe and European integration is analyzed. This analysis is enabled through interviews with Albanian politicians from the two main political parties, the Socialist and the Democratic parties, which have been the main pillars of Albanian post-communist politics. The sample consists of 10 politicians, active political agents, many of which occupy important political or governmental positions in Albania. The given sample is taken as representative of the national political elite since it represents the visions of both the left and right-wing parties and the governments who have ruled Albania from 1991. The list of the names and the positions of the politicians interviewed is presented in Appendix A. The questions were related to the ongoing process of European integration and other political spheres it affects; for instance, the Albanian Question in the Balkans. The interview format is presented in the Appendix B.

### 5.1. The Reconstruction of Albanian National History and Identity

In Albania terms like 'European integration', 'integration conditions' and 'integration processes' are common words that accompany the daily political life. These terms, which are frequently used in all the official meetings, regional summits and in the parliamentary hearings, constitute an important pillar of daily domestic and foreign politics. The integration process, European Union and its officials are present in all aspects of the Albanian life through election monitoring, economic assistance and active aid in reconstructing the Albanian institutions.

In the interviews held with the politicians it is seen that the Albanian political elite share very favourable images of Europe. The politicians view Europe as the cradle of world civilization and the historical centre of knowledge and science. Europe is imagined as the centre of ancient Greek and Roman civilization, the natural arena of European Renaissance and Enlightenment, which pointed the end of medieval darkness and obscurity and the beginning of a new age in all fields of culture, science, economic and politics. The politicians regard it as a unity of nations and cultures created historically and politically united in the aftermath of the Second World War. The political elite claim that for more than a half-century Europe has left alone the old hostilities between particular countries, which had caused extreme damages in the first part of the past century, and entered into a new epoch of continuous political and economic integration. They idealise Europe and describe it as the best civilization of all. These images are based on the ideas of Eurocentrism and the promotion of European identity by EU officials. European identity through the work of EU bureaucrats is portrayed as 'a kind of moral success story: the end product of a progressive ascent through history', doubtless a selective history- 'from ancient Greece and Rome, to the spread of Christianity, the Renaissance and the scientific revolution, the Age of the Reason, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the triumph of liberal democracy (Shore, 2000: 57).

However, according to the political elite, the modern European culture and identity are based not only on the contemporary values of democracy, respect for human

rights, economic prosperity and political stability but also on the common heritage and traditions with Europe which emphasize the struggles for national sovereignty, love for the art and literature. It looks like they have taken for granted all the images and the symbols the EU officials created for export. Perhaps, the emphasis of the Albanian political elite on the common culture with Europe, stems from the fact that the cultural dimension of Europe 'is now recognized as a key dimension of European integration' (Shore, 2000: 24). European Parliament in one of its reports stated that, 'the cultural dimension is becoming an increasingly crucial means of giving effect to policies seeking to foster a union of European peoples founded on the consciousness of sharing a common heritage of ideas and values' (cited in Shore, 2000: 25).

Most of the politicians attempt to legitimize Albania's place in Europe by claiming that the Albanian people have contributed much to the development and consolidation of European culture. For this, they give the names of some Albanian well-known artists, writers and architects of the last centuries. Nevertheless, during the interviews, some of the politicians emphasized the diversity in European culture to be one of the main characteristics of European identity. One of the respondents while mentioning why Europe should integrate Albania claimed that 'Albania will contribute to the diversity of European culture that would lead to more variety among people of Europe'. This is based on the message Europe gives to the newly liberated countries of Eastern and Central Europe through the slogan 'unity in diversity', through which Europe recognizes the variety of its people. Yet, the fact that the politicians distinguished the diversity element of European culture, marks the Albanian consciousness that the country is still far from Europe with respect to economic prosperity and democracy, that is why Albania can only foster diversity within European culture.

The politicians accept that European identity does not mean the denial of national identity but it fosters the identification of single European countries with European values based on the principles of democracy. However, some of the politicians do not hesitate to declare that equally important to democracy is also the common heritage that characterizes the European countries and Albania, obviously. Despite this,

European sceptics are not absent in the Albanian political life. Some politicians are aware that Albania's will to join Europe does not stem only from the desire of overcoming the unnatural division of Europe, but it is primarily strengthened by the economic factors. On an interview held on February 15, 2004 a DP member, Ilir Rusmali, argued that:

As EU was born from pure economic motivations and not cultural, ethnic or social ones, European identity can only be seen in an economic context. Today being European citizen is more convenience than passion; it is more a commodity than a spiritual need; more a goal than a reality.

Rusmali expresses the attractiveness Europe provides to the newly liberated ex-communist countries, which use European culture and identity for reaching to the economic and political privileges that EU guarantees to its members.

Neumann drew the common features of the rhetoric that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe applied while representing their states as European. He argued that the applicant countries while implying their European character tend to distinguish themselves from the countries to their East, which according to them are not European (Neumann 2001: 152-154). The fact that the Albanian political elite refer to the inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia should be analyzed in this framework. In this sense, pointing to the conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia seems to be an Albanian way of distinguishing the country from the region and such showing it Europeanness. This is merely a way of increasing Albania's affinity to Europe.

The phrase 'Albania is historically and geographically European, that's why she is eligible to join EU', is the most frequently used argument by the politicians who participated in this study. As Neumann explains, all Central European and applicant countries to EU while attempting to represent their countries' identity with respect to Europe, there is always reference to history (2001: 152). In the Albanian political discourse the reference to history and geography underlines these arguments: firstly, Albania is geographically a European country, and there is no doubt about it. Secondly, from the national awakening period the Albanians are presented as one of the most ancient people of Europe, speaking one of the oldest languages of Europe.

Therefore, this rhetoric legitimizes their historical place in Europe. The politicians refer to the Albania's Pelasgian and Illyrian ancestry as a matter of proving their antiquity in Europe. One politician responded: 'historically we are European. The Pelasgian-Illyrian inheritance indicates how ancient people we Albanians are in Europe'.

Thirdly, Albanian politicians refer to the Albanian wars of fifteen and sixteenth centuries against the Ottoman Empire as being crucial for European civilization and Christianity, since it is believed that Albanians hindered the Turkish advancement in Europe. Albania is conferred as a shield to European civilization and as the great rescuer of Europe. Historically, the national wars led by Skënderbeg against the Ottomans, until 1990s were presented only as national struggles for independence and liberty. However, as the need for European integration increased, in the post-communist era the perception of political elite on the national struggle changed. Agron Dibra, a SP member, pronounced that the wars under the leadership of Skënderbeg 'have served as a shield to European civilization by rescuing Europe from Ottoman attacks and goals of invading it'.

The Ottoman Empire is 'otherized' not only in Albania but also in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. For instance, the role of Skënderbeg in Hungary is assigned to Janos Hunyadi, who is the foremost national hero. Hunyadi, who inflicted great defeats on Turkish forces during 1440s, was viewed as the defender of Christendom in Hungarian mythology and the promoter of religious fervour against the Moslem Turks (Bideleux & Jeffries, 1998). Conversely, the Czech leader Jiri of Podebrady in 1460s is presented as championing the creation of a league of Christian rulers for putting resistance on the Turks (Bideleux & Jeffries, 1998: 245).

Thus, in the interviews it is seen that the politicians refer to two historical periods as detaching Albania from European culture and civilization. The first one is the Ottoman domination of five centuries, which is denounced for separating the country from European civilization and for imposing 'eastern' elements and features on Albania. The politicians realize that the Turkish rule severed Albania from European

modernization by political domination and by eradicating their Christianity, which produced incentives for the ones in the West to 'exclude' Albania from Europe.

In response to this domination, the Albanian politicians refer to the Ottomans as the "barbarians" with whom Albanians had nothing in common. In fact, as noted earlier, the Ottoman Empire is considered as the 'other' of Albania since the national awakening period of the late nineteenth century when the Turkish rule impeded the formation of a sovereign Albanian nation state. However, this rhetoric is generally present in all the Balkan countries. As Todorova notes, the creation of independent Balkan states required the total rejection of the political past, for which they attempted to 'substitute new European institutions for the Ottoman state institutions (1997: 170). The political elites consider the Ottoman domination as a source of negative consequences to the newly formed Balkan nations. To this regard, the representation of the Ottoman Empire as the 'other' of Albanian nation is not a post-communist phenomenon because it has been present for more than a century. Furthermore, it is not merely an Albanian phenomenon since it takes place in all the Balkan countries, which have a tradition of Ottoman domination. However, the representation of the Turks as "barbarians" who eradicated the Christianity of Albania is a new theme.

The second period that is presented by the politicians as a deviation and alienation from Europe is the communist regime. Communist regime is actually otherized in all Central and Eastern European countries and the Balkans. As Todorova argues, a new feature was added to the image of the Balkans especially after the Second World War, 'when a new demon, a new other- communism- was grafted on it' (Todorova, 1997: 133). Because of this new political experience, namely communism, the Balkans were gradually exempt from 'a much older and persistent characterisation: being oriental' (Todorova, 1997: 135). Václav Havel explains the harm of communist ideology in this way:

Ideology is a specious way of relating to the world. It offers human beings the illusion of identity, of dignity, and of morality, while making it easier for them to *part* with them. As the repository of something “supra-personal” and objective, it enables people to deceive their conscience and conceal, their true position and their inglorious *modus vivendi*, both from the world and from themselves (1985: 28-9).

In the interviews, the Albanian political elites unanimously blame communism for leaving Albania behind the West European countries and for hindering all ways of practicing or developing democracy and political pluralism. The Albanian politicians claim that after such a long deviation from Europe, joining Europe is more than a desire; it is a necessity for Albania, because the Albanians ought to get out of the isolation and its psychosis. Ilir Rusmali, one of the respondents, claimed that ‘today Albanians more than ever need to be a part of the Union and not division’. Nevertheless, as it is seen in the post-communist era both the Ottoman legacy and the communist regimes were Easternized, at least in Albania.

The Albanian political class believes that the European character of Albania lies at the Albanian wars for creating a nation state and at the struggle for independence and sovereignty. According to these politicians, the struggle for independence constitutes one of the common characteristics and shared values of Albania with Europe. They represent the Albanian struggle for independence and sovereignty as if it was a highly desired feature. Yet, as generally known, even though Europe has a history of wars, which mostly were not wars of independence but wars for domination, it does not represent itself with respect to its wars and struggles. The images of Europe, promoted by the EU are mainly based on peace, stability, economic prosperity and commitment to democracy.

The Albanian politicians claim that Albania is certainly European. They imagine the country as located at a very important geopolitical position, at the crossroad of civilizations between East and West. The political elite represent Albania as the historical place of the crossing and clashes of cultures, and the place of the different traditions. The country is viewed as the most important gate of Europe to the Balkans, to the Asia and the Middle East. Thus, the politicians refer to Albania’s

geographic prominence as something unique, which carries special political role that cannot be played by any other country. Analogously, in the post-communist work of Albanian writers and scholars the representation of Albania as a 'twilight zone' between East and West is met. Misha describes Albania as historically 'a land between' where Catholic and Orthodox Churches, the Roman and the Byzantine Empires confronted each other for long time (1997: 10).

The self-perception of being at the crossroad of the civilizations is common to most of the Balkan and East European countries (see Todorova, 1997). As generally known, the political elite of post-communist European countries refer to their countries as crossroads or bridges of civilizational contacts for escaping from the 'East' and for including themselves to the category of 'West' gradually. The phrase that the 'bridges are not to live on but to pass on them' which is emphasized in academic circles, reflect the transitional character and role of the use of 'bridges'.

## 5.2. Religious Identities

Only when asked about the common characteristics between Albanian and European cultures there is reference to Christianity, otherwise Christianity is not mentioned as a common characteristic of contemporary European nations. In the interviews the fact that Albania up to medieval era was homogeneously Christian is an over-emphasized fact. However, the politicians do not distinguish among the Catholic and the Orthodox Christians of the medieval time, but they highlight that the country had very tight connections with the Western Europe through the Church of Vatican, through which Europe maintained its influence. The pattern of using Christianity of confirming their Europeanness is also seen in the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe mainly, Poland, Hungary, Croatia and Slovenia. This argument was also used by Kundera, who stated that the Roman Catholic Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia always constituted the 'eastern border of the west' rather than the western border of the east (1984: 33). However, it is interesting that a multi-religious country like Albania promotes Christianity for showing its affinity to Europe.



As noted earlier, the Albanian politicians claim that with the Ottoman invasion most of the Albanians lost their Christianity and were converted to Islam. However, they hold the Ottoman domination responsible not only for eradicating the Christianity of Albania but also for detaching the country from European civilization. The politicians describe Christianity as a crucial element of Albanian history and identity, which confirms the Europeanness of its people.

While referring to the medieval Albania, most of the politicians emphasize that Albania was historically oriented towards Europe and the West, neglecting the fact that in the medieval era the 'West' did not exist as a political category. All these arguments indicate the wish and the need for describing Albania as a part of Western civilization as much as possible. However, the politicians highlight the today's religious tolerance of Albania as a characteristic of modern Europe. The politicians portray Albania as a small country where people of different religion faiths live in peace and harmony with each other, unlike the neighbouring countries. Yet, the politicians do not mention religious statistics that circulate in foreign and native circles according to which, approximately 70% of Albanians are Muslims, 20% Orthodox and 10% Roman Catholics. This derives not only from the prevailing Albanian view that religion should not be intermingled with national identity or politics, but also from the absent evidence of these statistics.

According to foreign scholars the tendency to reduce religion to something unimportant in Albania as expressed in the phrase 'the faith of Albanians is Albanianism' and what communists taught that religion has never been a divisive issue among the Albanian population, actually highlight the prominence of religious identification in Albania (Draper, 1997). The integration of religion into Albanian national ideology seems to be one of country's biggest challenges (Draper, 1997: 133).

After the ban on religion was lifted in 1991 the religious practice was revived through the Albanian communities of Sunni Muslims, Bektashis, and Orthodox and Catholic Christians. Together with this, the restoration of the building of tens of

churches and mosques, predominantly with the assistance of foreign countries and international religious organizations was enhanced. To little surprise, the secularization process fostered by Enver Hoxha regime made people know almost nothing about religion. By the early 1990s, the majority of Albanians inherited no culture of religious practice, 'only an inherited identity' (Vickers & Pettifer, 1999: 116). In order to describe the ignorance of Albanians towards religion, Islamic Relief reported in 1992 that the Muslim Albanians resembled a dry sponge, 'ready to soak up anything given to them' (Vickers & Pettifer, 1999: 104).

The revival of the religion in the early 1990s became a subject of popular debate. Albania's joining the OIC (Organization of Islamic Countries) in the end of 1992 was commented abroad and at home as an opening of the country towards the Muslim world and Islamic fundamentalism (Biberaj, 1999). Although the ties with the Muslim world, and Turkey especially, have increased in the post-communist era, European countries are Albania's most important trading and investment partners (Milo, 2002). However, the political elite claim that Albania's European relations are principal and there is no possibility that Albania distance herself from Europe for developing closer relations with the Islamic countries. However, country's opening to the Muslim world, provoked various reactions in Albanian society and a debate on country's position both in Europe and the Islamic world with respect to religious revival (Clayer, 1997: 133).

In the same year, worried about the increasing Islamic influence in Albania, country's most prominent intellectual and writer, Ismail Kadare, from his bases in Paris claimed that since Albania was increasingly represented and identified as a Muslim country, the Christian Europe would be less willing to help it (Vickers & Pettifer, 1997: 104). Kadare stated that 'Albanians are among those people who have suffered equally from Communism and from Islam' (cited in Vickers & Pettifer, 1997: 104). Obviously, this remark caused sharp criticisms of the Albanian Muslim community mainly that of diaspora, since the Muslims of Albania which were living in turmoil, could not get the prominence of this statement. Erroneously, in some cases the declaration of Kadare was interpreted as if he stated that an opening to

Europe required the Muslim population to give up Islam, and perhaps to convert to Christianity (see Clayer, 1997).

As Nathalie Clayer carefully notes, the cultural and ideological competition between different religious faiths in Albania gyrates around the issues of 'tradition versus modernity', the integration of the country into Europe and more commonly around country's position between East and West, relations with Albanians in the neighbouring countries, and the preservation of an Albanian national identity (1997: 133). Regarding identity, there are Muslim leaders in Albania who maintain that Islam has played a unique role in the preservation of Albanian identity, mainly because it stopped the process of assimilation by the Slavs, Greeks and Latins (Clayer, 1997: 135). Even though religion was not used as a mark of identity during the national awakening, the threat of Orthodox religious community was the main catalysing force which gave rise to early Albanian national movement (Draper, 1997). This view is also maintained by some contemporary Albanian nationalists who recognize the religious influence on the formation of the Albanian nation, and emphasize the positive role of Islam during the process of the consolidation of the Albanian nation (Sulstarova, 2002a: 61). For instance, Abdi Baleta, the leader of the National Revival Party, alleges that Albanians' mass Islamization of the seventeenth century materialized because of the perceived threat coming from the neighbouring Orthodox people. 'Islam has become a characteristic of Albanian national physiognomy, which stresses even more their separate identity from the surrounding peoples (Baleta, cited in Sulstarova, 2002a: 61).

However, some circles in Albania attempted to exalt Albanians' Muslim identity, by arguing that those Albanians who embraced Islam were the true Albanians, because the Islamic religion was the strongest element which rescued Albania from the Serbs and the Greeks (Lubonja, 2002: 102). These arguments were used by irredentist circles, which tried to create anti-Western myths based on religion by presenting the Greeks and the Serbs as allies of the West (Lubonja, 2002:102).

On the other hand, there are Albanian scholars who argue that foreign countries use religion for making Albania a country of their influence (Misha, 1997). Firstly, the Greeks started their attempts for increasing their influence in the south of Albania under the leadership of Bishop Anastisios Yannoulatos, immediately after the breakdown of communist rule. Such Greek individuals and groups are in continuous activity for taking under control the Albanian autocephalous Orthodox Church. Secondly, missionaries and clerics from a variety of European and American Christian Churches came to Albania in the early 1990s. Indeed, their religious beliefs did not represent Roman Catholicism as much as they represented Evangelical Brotherhoods like Jehovah's Witnesses or Baha'is, which obviously had no connection with the Albania's established religion. Thirdly, many Islamic foundations and donors came to Tirana from all over the world promising to assist rebuilding of mosques, assisting Albania economically and starting the spiritual revival of Muslim population. Considering the conditions of Albanian religious institutions, assistance from abroad was necessary by not rarely in Albania came representatives of fanatic extremist sects which tried to use the poverty and moral crisis of Albania for increasing their influence and fulfill their plans (Misha, 1997: 95). Such was the case of the Koran translated in Albanian in which it was claimed that 'Albania was the edge of the Islamic triangle in Europe, the sides of which were Bosnia and Kosova' (Misha, 1997: 95). These dangerous incidents were aim to incite religious fundamentalism and irredentism in Albania.

Mainly because of the long secularization process initiated by Enver Hoxha in 1960s, today in Albania the four religious community, Sunni Muslims, Bektashis, Orthodox and Catholic Christians seem to live in harmony to each other. Despite the revival of religious practice the population as a whole remained largely secular (Vickers & Pettifer, 1999). However, some religious provocations fostered by foreign irredentist elements have demonstrated that religion in Albania carries the potential of fostering internal conflicts. According to Draper, the belief that religion has never been a divisive issue in Albania should be elaborated and Albanian people must deal with their religious affiliation and should try to incorporate these beliefs into their national identifications (1997: 140).

### 5.3. Inter-party Competition

Firstly, all the politicians reveal that there is no other alternative for Albania in the future than its integration to EU and other European structures. Secondly, they criticize Europe for being so demanding with Albania and for setting up tough conditions for EU membership. According to the Albanian political elite, the hard conditionality EU puts on Albania can cause a decrease of Albanian peoples' credibility to Europe. A SP respondent put it this way: 'the enthusiasm of early 1990s about 'joining Europe' and 'becoming like Europe' will soon turn into a kind of pessimism since the high standards required by EU will make Albanians get out of the sleep and the beautiful European dream can be ruined'.

Despite this, most of the interviewed do not hold responsible the EU for the delay in the implementation of an accurate integrating policy towards Albania and other countries of the region and for the slow rhythm of itegration They do not hold Europe accountable for not setting any association agreement with Albania and other Yugoslavian Republics before 1999, when Europe got preoccupied about the possibility of instability in Yugoslavian Republics spilling over. It is interesting because the political elites do not show dissatisfaction towards Europe, regarding the fact that EU still does not give any clear prospect for Albania's membership to EU. Indeed, the two political parties blame each other for hindering the association process because of the slow rhythm of the institutional reforms in the country. The Socialist Party, which came to power in 1997, blames the former party on power, the DP, for leaving the country for so long at the 'waiting room' of European integration and enlargement processes. A Socialist politician explained that 'Albania in November 1992 became a member of the OIC, which was never ratified by the Albanian Parliament'. 'The President Berisha took a wrong step at a wrong direction which sent Europe a false message'. Obviously, both the Socialists and the Democrats blame communism for inheriting Albania weak social, political and economic institutions. Democrats on their side, accuse the existing Nano government for failing at building state institutions and democracy, without which European accession is impossible.

Evidently, the dynamics of European enlargement brought a new dimension to the internal politics by bringing the inter-party conflicts to European dimension. The fact that the two Albanian political parties do not attempt to link the relative delay of Albania for taking a clear membership date with the general ongoing process of European enlargement, but continue holding responsible each other show that the divided and personalized politics in Albania is not over yet.

The government of 'Coalition for Integrity' led by the Socialist Party tries to justify itself by claiming that European integration is a very difficult process, which requires immense efforts on institutional reforms. In the Albanian daily 'Shekulli' the Albanian Minister of European Integration, Ermelinda Meksi explains that: 'the more the distances that separate us from the EU decreases, the more difficult the integration process becomes. European integration is a difficult process indeed, for Albania, which came out from a long dictatorship, an incomparable communism with that of other countries'.<sup>44</sup> By this rhetoric the minister claims that even though the government is trying hard, the accession date to the European Union is still far for Albania.

The Minister also states that:

The joining of EU by ten new associate countries, which have been more developed and prepared for the integration than we are because of their tradition, demonstrates that the process of European integration will advance on the basis of accomplishment of a wide series of criteria. These countries have applied a long time ago the reforms that we are starting only today. We should remind that the liberalizing reforms have started a long time before the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>45</sup>

The minister highlights that the European integration process for Albania will progress only on the basis of the criteria set by European Commission and EU, and there is no room for expectations for early membership. According to Meksi intensive work is required by the Albanian government to accomplish the standards

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<sup>44</sup> Shekulli, 10 Maj 2004.

<sup>45</sup> Shekulli, 10 Maj 2004.

settled by EU, and since Albania has great institutional handicap the delay for EU membership is normal. However, in order to legitimize this delay the minister attempts to dissociate Albania and its political-historic past from that of the Eastern European countries, which joined EU on May 2004. She tends to emphasize the difference between the political tradition of Albania and that of other Eastern European countries.

The Albanian Minister of European Integration, like the other politicians, claims that the integration of Albania into Europe has been delayed and impeded by the Albanian political class itself since the political conflicts gave birth to political instability, which affected all the economic-political developments in the country. This political instability once originated from the structures of Democratic Party, recently it stems from the conflicts within Socialist Party, as noted early. Ilir Meta, who is engaged in the internal conflict of SP, explains:

We started the process of Stabilization Association together with Croatia and Macedonia four years ago, but it is clear that we are still much behind since they have signed the agreement and have presented their requests for association. We are beyond them and apparently we are waiting for the other group of Serbia-Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina or Kosova which have bigger problems than we do.<sup>46</sup>

The ex-PM accuses the Albanian government for failing to implement a clear vision and policies with respect to European integration process. In this sense, in Albania the struggle for European integration has become a real political arena where the political parties and the politicians continue holding responsible each other for the slow rhythm of reforms. This makes the cooperation between these political parties almost unattainable. Ilir Meta, although a SP associate accuses Nano government for depriving Albanians of the possibility of joining Europe.

Besnik Mustafaj, a DP respondent claimed that 'the political crisis especially inside the Socialist Party is slowing down the rhythm of the reforms; it is affecting severely

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<sup>46</sup> Shekulli, 5 Maj 2004.

the political stability of the country and hindering the Albania's association to the EU structures'. All these events show that the Albanian political class uses the process of European integration as a legitimate battleground for their internal political disputes, where no political agents takes on the proper responsibility.

#### 5.4. The Geopolitics and the Albanian Question in the Balkans

Asked about the integration of Albania to the European Union with respect to the Albanian Question in the Balkans, all the politicians expressed clearly the idea that as long as Albania would be striving for a successful integration to Europe, any idea of unification among Albanian territories will be out of discussion. A Socialist respondent explained that:

The integration of the Albanians to the EU is the only modern and contemporary opportunity of the near future for Albanians to live in a single family. The most secure way for the unification of Albanians is the construction of an integrated future for the Albanians based on a modern philosophy and not by looking back at classical concepts of national identity and nationalism which require the unification of Albania with the Albanian territories outside, that would definitely exclude Albania from European integration processes.

The politicians expressed their awareness related to the fact that the European integration and the unification of Albanian territories in the Balkans exclude each other. The will and the need of Albanians to become integrated into Europe dictate that the Albanian governments do not bring the 'Albanian Question' to daily agenda because it would only foster instability in the region, which is not wanted neither by Albania nor Europe. For this purpose the process of European integration necessitates that Albanian politics follow a peaceful policy in the region which is believed by the political elite to be very important for maintaining stability in the Balkans.

That the stand of Albanian foreign policy on the Albanian question in the Balkans is influenced by the premises of European integration or by anything else, that is unclear, but obviously the role of Europe in this issue is predominant. The Albanian



political elite consider the framework of European integration a good opportunity for the resolution of the Albanian question once for all. A Socialist Party member, Petro Koçi, said that 'an Albanian unification can be reached only by the integration of all countries of our region to EU since it will bring Albanians together in Europe'. Another respondent, Bamir Topi, claimed that 'since we are striving for European integration there are no premises for an Albanian unification under a single nation. We want stability in the Balkans since it is to our interest'.

Mainly, all politicians consider European integration as a process, which increases the chances for better cooperation and cultivation of Albanian world. The political elite also regard integration as an opportunity given to all Albanians for living together. However, even though all the politicians claimed that Kosova should gain its independence, two of the respondents maintained that in the long term the possibility for an Albanian unification could not be denied since the parceling of the Albanian territories of 1912 was an injustice committed against the Albanian nation.

Asked about the regional cooperation and the relations of Albania with the Balkans and Eastern European countries the politicians admitted that the regional collaboration is an important ingredient of the Albanian foreign policy. The general idea expressed is that the Balkan countries should help each other for the purpose of entering in Europe together. For the Albanian politicians the relations with the Balkan countries are based on collaboration, common interest, and exchange of experience since they share same problems and same goals. Some of the politicians claim that in many regional summits and meeting, the Albanian party has suggested the formation of a regional 'Schengen' (border policy), which would foster regional cooperation. As generally suggested, the will of Albanian political class to intensify the cooperation with the neighbouring countries can be seen as a duty assigned by EU to the Western Balkans, since EU officials continue emphasizing the role of regional collaboration on these countries' integration to Europe.

Most of the politicians argued that the countries of Eastern Europe do not enjoy the priorities they used to have in Albanian foreign policy during the communist regime.

However, for them the Balkans continue to be at the centre of Albania's foreign policy because these countries share the interest of Euro-Atlantic integration, and the minority and emigration problems, which are of prominent relevance. On the other hand, as the politicians claim, the regional approach initiated by the EU, necessitates that Albania develop cooperative relations with the Balkan countries. The political elite also highlight the fact that since almost half of Albanian people live in the neighbouring countries, the Albanian government is constrained to form close ties with these countries.

In general the politicians assess the good relations with the Balkans and Eastern European countries as a requirement for European integration. Some politicians even claim that the good partnership and collaborative relations with the Balkans and Eastern Europe would affect positively the Albanian relations with the EU. However, as generally known in academic literature, Albania's relations with the neighbouring countries have never been as smooth as presented by the Albanian politicians. During the years of transition Kosova problem was one of the most important element in Albanian Balkan policy, which had a capacity to draw Albania into war with Serbia, which would lead to a wider Balkan crisis (Vickers & Pettifer, 1999: 141). As generally suggested, one of the most important pillars of Albanian foreign policy of post-communism was the avoidance of war. Moreover, many of the contemporary Albanian nationalists claim that Serbia, Greece and Macedonia remain the most dangerous enemies of Albania (Baleta, cited in Sulstarova, 2002a: 63).

Albanians are currently at home on their ethnic territories in Serbia and Montenegro, Former-Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece and eventually in Albania. In 1989 Belgrade abolished the autonomy of the province of Kosova and from then ruled it with violence. After that in September 1991 Kosovars voted in a referendum they proclaimed Kosova as a 'sovereign and independent state'. The passive conflicts between the Albanian population of Kosova and the Serbian authorities in Belgrade, which dates from the uprising of Prishtina in 1981, continued until 1998 when it was transformed into a real war between Serb forces and Kosova Liberation Army

(KLA). This inflicted the intervention of NATO a year later, and from then Kosova became a United Nations protectorate.

Through the 1990s the Albanian population in FYROM was also experiencing conflicting relations with the Macedonian government. The Albanians among other basic minority rights, demanded from the government the recognition of Albania as a constituent nation and the declaration of Albanian as the second official language in areas populated by them. The situation deteriorated after an Albanian group named National Liberation Army entered an armed conflict with the Macedonian police forces. The basic rights of the Albanian population were granted by an agreement facilitated by the international community.

Relations with Greece have been more problematic because of the demands the two parts had on each other. Despite the expulsion of 40,000 Albanian Muslims from Çamëria to Albania in 1944, the number of Albanian-speaking population in these territories is currently unknown. Evidently, the Greek government does not recognize this community as a minority. However, on its part, Greece complained about the infringements on the human rights of the Greek minority in Albania and raised territorial claims on southern Albania, which they call Northern Epirus. Tension between Greece and Albania remain and it is fostered basically by irredentist groups in Greece which call for the annexation of southern Albania (Elsie, 2004: 172).

Even though the Serb-Kosovar conflict was represented by the Serbian part as a search for a 'Greater Albania', this term has never been used in Albania. As Elsie explains,

The concept of a Greater Albania, i.e., the unification of all Albanian-settled territories into one state, was launched by Benito Mussolini when, on 12 August 1941, Italian forces, having occupied Kosova and the Albanian-speaking regions of Plava, Gucia and Ulqin (Ulcinj) in Montenegro, reunited these territories with Albania itself (2004: 167).

The term has been kept alive by Belgrade in order to justify its effort for a Greater Serbia (Elsie, 2004: 167). Actually 'no significant Albanian political party has called

for a Greater Albania since democracy was established in 1991-2' (Pettifer, 2001: 20). In the Albanian party, there exists a wish to retain the modest gains in the international rank that were achieved during the Kosova war and which seem to be seriously threatened by the uncritical approval of the post-Milosevic regime in Belgrade by the EU (Pettifer, 2001: 20).

In Albania some scholars claim that the answers to the Albanian question in the Balkans can be better found in Prishtina and Skopje than in Tirana, since Albania has never been able to treat the Albanian question in a traditional form, as a mother country pursuing irredentist goals.<sup>47</sup> This occurs mainly because the communist regime in the country significantly weakened the nationalist feelings. It is generally accepted that, the legacies of communism, like the isolationist policies and the abusive employment of nationalistic ideology alienated the Albanians from anything that involved nationalism. However, there exist in Albania politicians who, as noted early, organized around the Nationalist Revival Party, think that the 'national unification of Albanians in a single state is a historical duty for all of them' (Sulstarova, 2002a: 65). These nationalists do not exclude the armed struggle as a mechanism for realizing the unification of all ethnic Albanian territories, and they support the struggle of Kosova Liberation Army and National Liberation Army of the Albanians of Macedonia (Sulstarova, 2002a: 66). Notwithstanding, the National Revival Party never played any significant role in the post-communist political arena or foreign policy, and seemingly it has low chances for playing any greater role in the future.

Asked about the term they preferred for describing the geopolitical position of contemporary Albania, the politicians responded preferring the terms 'Europe' and 'Western Balkans' against the notions of 'South Eastern Europe', 'Eastern Europe' and 'Balkans'. It is an interesting fact that even though some of the respondents named some of the factors, which had led to the Balkans' gaining a pejorative meaning, most of the respondents preferred using the term 'Western Balkans' for determining the geopolitical position of their country.

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<sup>47</sup> Kajsiu, Bumçi, Rakipi (2003). Op. cit., p. 154.

Three of the respondents claimed that Albania is located in Europe at large and particularly in Western Balkans, not only with respect to geographical position but also regarding the SAP where Albania is a part of EU policy for Western Balkans. None of the politicians related to the geopolitical position of Albania to the concept of Eastern Europe since according to them, Eastern Europe as an ideological connotation does not exist anymore. A Socialist respondent, Agron Dibra said that: 'I prefer the term Western Balkans not only because this term coincides with our geographic position but it also coincides with Albania's historical, social and economic position'.

The ones who preferred to use the term 'Europe' argued that Albania is historically a European country and the usage of any other term to describe its geopolitical position would draw boundaries within Europe. However, a DP respondent replied that:

The term South Eastern Europe is a more suitable term since it indicates that the distinction stemmed from the historical and geopolitical conditions which have brought a relative backwardness in Albania and which calls for special support and assistance.

The fact that most of the politicians prefer the terms 'Europe' and 'Western Balkans' for determining the geopolitical position of Albania shows the great will of Albanian politics at internalizing and embracing European Union's policies for the Western Balkans where Albania is included. The term Western Balkans, which was never used before 1990s for describing the position of Albania, is adopted by the Albanian political elites for describing the relations with the Europe and the distance from the EU membership.

Considering all what was discussed in this chapter, it can be seen that the impact of European enlargement and integration processes has showing itself in the Albanian political discourse. Not only does European integration encourage the political elite for re-designing and re-constructing the Albanian national history for inventing more cultural affinity with Europe, but it also shapes the main framework of country's foreign policy. Yet, European Union has much to prove that the national political

elite themselves embrace European values and make a firm break up from the legacies of divisiveness, authoritarianism, and personalized politics, which continue damaging the Albanian democracy and impeding its road to Europe. The political elite succeeded at making European integration framework a legitimate ground for continuing their political conflicts. Conversely, the internal political conflicts take place in all of the post-communist Central and Eastern European countries, and they are not specific to Albania despite the fact that the latter has bigger problems.

## CONCLUSION

As is generally known, identities are context bound and at a period of radical change they are represented in new ways. In the post-communist transformation process, galvanized by the European integration and enlargement processes, Albania is experiencing a new rhetoric in a political level. This rhetoric revolves mainly around seven points. Firstly, Albanian political elite claims a historical place for Albania in Europe. Secondly, there is an emphasis on Albania's common culture with Europe. Thirdly, Europeanness of Albania is supported by the imagined 'national' struggles of medieval times against the Ottoman Empire, where the leader Skënderbeg is represented as the champion of both Christianity and European civilization. Fourthly, the Ottoman domination and communism are represented as the two historical legacies, which detached Albania from the Western European civilization and made it a part of the 'East'. Fifthly, the political elite considers the geographic position of Albania as uniquely important. They regard it as a bridge between East and West and as a point of contact between the two antagonist civilizations. Sixthly, there is an emphasis on Albania's contribution to the consolidation of European culture through its art, tradition and culture. Lastly, the political elite believes that Albania's persistent struggle for national independence highlights the country's Europeanness. Moreover, the restoration of the past history and the re-positioning of the Ottoman domination and communist regime as 'otherized' political phenomena are accompanied by a representation of Albania as religious and ethnic tolerant. By pointing to the ethnic conflicts that the new republics of ex-Yugoslavia experienced throughout the 90's, the political class aims at supporting the Europeanness of Albania.

The stands of the political elite show that Albania of new millennium pursues a cooperative regional policy, where the answer to the national question in the Balkans is not given in the framework of classic nationalist theories which are based on ethnic relations. In contrast, the national politicians hold that only an integration of all Albanians living in the Balkan countries, to European Union will resolve the

Albanian question. It means that for the moment Albanians will be content with living in different countries but with identifying as Albanians in general and as Albanians from Albania, or Albanians from Kosovo or Macedonia in particular.

However, as is generally suggested, the alienation of Albanians to 'Europe' and 'West' as a result of the Turkish domination and the communist regime cannot prove the belongingness of Albania to the 'common European home'. The Albanian politicians hold responsible the Turks for eradicating their Christianity at a time when the national and foreign scholars maintain that the Islamization of Albanian population has been vitally important for assuring the survival of Albanian nation and for protecting it from the aggressive goals of the neighbouring Orthodox Slavs. The belief that Albania's historical struggle for independence and sovereignty stresses its European character seems to be a continuation of the nationalist ideology, which derives from national awakening ideology and was strengthened during the communism. This shows that the myth of permanent struggle is still alive in the contemporary national ideology of Albania and it is ambiguously used for supporting Europeanness of the country.

This dissertation provides a general picture of the impact of European enlargement on the representation of Albanian identity, history and politics and the prominence of European culture with respect to EU membership. It is shown that what happened in the 1990s in Albania was not different from the developments of Central and Eastern Europe, where the re-designation of the economies, state institutions and politics according to European model, brought a restoration of the historical links of these countries with Europe. Even though the Albanian political elite share a very favourable image of Europe, they are not getting rid of the old tradition of authoritarianism, divisiveness and personalized politics. The two overriding political parties to legitimate their conflicts use the framework of the EU integration. In this sense, it is necessary that the EU creates new incentives for the formation of a new pluralistic political climate in the country.



Seen from another point of view, the emphasis that the Albanian politicians put on the country's affinity to Europe shows the need and the willingness for Albania to become a part of Europe. In the end, the intensifying attempts of Albanian political and cultural elite to prove their 'Europeanness' is conditioned by the contemporary projects and discourses on European culture and identity expressed and cultivated by the representatives of EU and Western intellectuals and politicians. As is generally agreed, in the present framework of European integration presenting a state as European and having it recognized as such by the EU, is a very important issue, which is taken seriously by the Union. The best proof for this is the inclusion of Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary to EU after they articulated a successful political and cultural representation as 'Central Europe'.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What does Europe and European identity mean to you? What characteristics does they have?
2. What do you think are the common cultural values between Albania and Europe, if any? What are the cultural values and traditions that can serve as links (bridges) with Europe?
3. How do you see the integration of Albania to EU with respect to Albanian question in the Balkans? Is there any possibility of unification of all Albanian territories in the Balkans?
4. If the right of EU membership would be denied to Albania, what could be the other alternative(s) for the future of Albania?
5. Aside the Western Europe, how do you assess the relations of Albania with countries of Eastern Europe and Balkans? What is the vision of your party for Albania's regional policy?
6. Do you think that recently it is done a good job for the integration of Albania into European Union? Could it be more?
7. Which of the following terms would you prefer to determine the geopolitical position of contemporary Albania and why?
  - a) Balkans
  - b) Western Balkans
  - c) Eastern Europe
  - d) Southeastern Europe
  - e) Europe

## APPENDIX B

### LIST OF THE NAMES AND THE POSITIONS OF THE INTERVIEWED POLITICIANS

Agron Dibra-	General Secretary of SP for Public Relations, Member of Parliament
Bamir Topi-	Vice Chairperson of the Democratic Party, Head of Parliamentarian group of DP
Besnik Mustafaj-	Secretary of Foreign Relations of the DP, Member of Parliament
Gramoz Ruçi-	General Secretary of Socialist Party, Head of Parliamentarian group of SP
Illir Rusmali-	Secretary for Judicial Affairs of DP, Member of Parliament
Makbule Çeço-	Vice President of Albanian Parliament (SP)
Marjeta Zaçe-	Member of Parliament (DP)
Marko Bello-	Minister of State, Member of Parliament (SP)
Pal Dajçi-	Member of Parliament (DP)
Petro Koçi-	Member of Parliament (SP), Ex- Minister of the Interior of Albania