

ALBANIA'S QUEST FOR THE EU MEMBERSHIP AND THE PROLONGED
INTEGRATION PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

ALBANIA'S QUEST FOR THE EU MEMBERSHIP AND THE PROLONGED INTEGRATION PROCESS

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The main aim of this thesis is to analyze Albania's ongoing EU integration process and to consider Albania's bid for the EU membership. This study, by providing an overview of Albania-EU relations in time and presenting an analysis of the stances of the social forces in the country regarding the EU integration process, aims to reveal the existence or not of a hegemonic pro-membership perspective in this regard. In addition, an analysis of the EU's stance towards this Albania's quest for the EU membership is to be considered as the other side of the same coin and as such, it is to be essential in the understanding of the process indeed. This thesis considers the integration theories as insufficient in explaining the Albania's EU integration process and thus tries to make an analysis of it by reading it through the lenses of neo-Gramscian perspectives. Whereas a pro-membership perspective seems to be at work on the Albania side, though a very fragile hegemony, the absence or lack of it on the EU side has resulted in a prolonged integration process for the country. The thesis thus argues that Albania's EU integration is an open-ended process.

Keywords: EU integration, hegemony, neo-Gramscian perspectives, open-ended process, membership quest.

ÖZ

ARNAVUTLUĞUN AB ÜYELİK ARAYIŞI VE UZAYAN ENTEGRASYON SÜRECİ

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Yüksek Lisans, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü

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Bu tezin amacı Arnavutluk'un devam eden AB entegrasyon sürecini ve AB adaylık başvurusunu analiz etmektir. Bu çalışma, Arnavutluk-AB ilişkileri hakkında genel bir açıklama sunarak ve ülkedeki sosyal güçlerin AB entegrasyon sürecindeki politik tutumlarını göz önünde bulundurarak, pro- üyelik hegemonik bir perspektifin var olup olmadığını tespit etmeyi hedeflemektedir. Ek olarak, Arnavutluk'un AB üyelik macerasına yönelik AB'nin tutumunun bir analizi de madalyonun öteki yüzü olarak görülmeli ve sürecin anlaşılmasında önemli bir etken olarak anlaşılmalıdır. Bu tezde, entegrasyon teorileri Arnavutluk'un AB'ye entegrasyon sürecini açıklamada yetersiz görülmektedir ve bu nedenle süreç, neo-Gramsci'ci bakış açılarından analiz edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Oysa pro-üyelik perspektif Arnavutluk tarafında, oldukça kırılğan bir hegemonya da olsa, işe yarar gibi görülürken, bunun AB tarafında yokluğu veya eksikliği ülkenin entegrasyon sürecinin uzamasına neden olmaktadır. Tez, böylece, Arnavutluk'un AB entegrasyonunu ucu açık bir süreç olarak ele almaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: AB entegrasyonu, hegemonya, neo-Gramşiyen perspektifleri, ucu açık bir süreç, üyelik arayışı.

To My Parents

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------|---|
| AFOR | Albanian Force for Humanitarian Assistance |
| CARDS | Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization |
| CEE | Central Eastern Europe |
| DP | Democratic Party |
| EFTA | European Free Trade Association |
| EU | European Union |
| FDI | Foreign Direct Investment |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| SMI | Socialist Movement for Integration |
| INSTAT | Albanian Institute of Statistics |
| IPA | Instruments for Pre-Accession |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NGO | Non-governmental Organization |
| PA | Public Officials |
| PHARE | Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies |

| | |
|-----|---|
| PLA | Party of Labour of Albania |
| SAA | Stabilization and Association Agreement |
| SAP | Stabilization and Association Process |
| SEE | South Eastern Europe |
| SP | Socialist Party |
| SP | Stability Pact |
| UN | United Nations |
| WB | Western Balkans |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The December 1990-April 1991 students' demonstrations not only signed the overthrow of the communist party rule; that of the Party of Labour of Albania (PLA), it also pledged a promising future of democracy.¹ With that, 45 years of authoritarian rule and complete isolation from the rest of the world was finally being left behind; it was now the time for Albanians to open up a new page in their history.

Throughout its lifetime as an independent entity Albania has been what is called as a 'weak state' and consequently it has continuously been in search of external help.² In fact, it is one of the legacies that Albania has kept shifting alliances from time to time. Such has been the case during the early years of independence; similar to that has been the communist party rule period when Albania initially allied with Yugoslavia, then Russia, then China until it finally fell into complete isolation; the same stands for the transition period as well. The presence of 'outsiders' has been considered as the only panacea. Therefore, opening itself to the West and establishing ties with the USA and the European countries were among the first steps being undertaken after the collapse of the PLA rule.³ While Westernization still remains the trend, Europeanization has now gained more salience.

¹ Elez Biberaj, *Albania in Transition: The Rocky Road to Democracy*, WestView Press, Colorado, 1999, p.82.

² Dilaver Arıkan Açı, *Small State Playing the Assymmetric Game: Continuity and Change in Albanian Foreign Policy*, PhD Thesis, Metu, Ankara, 2008. [Connect to http://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12609692/index.pdf](http://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12609692/index.pdf)

³ Elez Biberaj, *op.cit.*, p.232-238.

Geographic position has come nowadays to mean no more really belonging to somewhere. Although an integral part of the old European continent, Albania and the whole Western Balkans countries now seem to be engaged in a new endeavor: ‘the return to Europe’! The European Union (EU) is to be the ‘only game in town’ and as such EU integration has come to be a top-priority issue in the agenda of the whole region. How hard is Albania striving and how far it is from the ‘final destination’ is a matter of debate and as such requires further research.

This thesis seeks to analyze the ongoing process of Albania’s quest for the EU membership. The examination of Albania-EU relations from the early 1990s to the present days will be the central theme of this study. While elaborating with Albania’s efforts to ‘Europeanize’ itself, special attention will be given to the main driving factors and the underlying reasons of such an attempt. Therefore, the examination of the stances of all social forces in Albania is to shed light on the nature of Albania’s quest for the EU membership.

Yet, this may not be enough to ensure the success of Albania’s EU integration. As such, a detailed analysis of the ‘EU side of the story’ is considered to be essential to the better understanding of the integration process in general, and that of Albania’s quest for the EU membership in particular. The underlying incentives of the EU’s engagement with Albania and the extent these have been translated into catalysts for the country’s integration process; the way the EU is making use of its conditionality leverage and the extent this in turn has proven to be efficient for the case of Albania are among the issues that arise interest and demand special attention. In other words, the examination of the EU’s stances regarding Albania’s quest for the EU membership is to be considered as the other side of the same coin.

This thesis, as mentioned earlier, focuses on Albania-EU relations. In fact, literature review shows that there is a plethora of works on this topic. Different scholars offer a variety of interpretations and arguments regarding Albania’s EU integration process, and as such obtaining a consensual concluding remark is very difficult, not to say out of question. But if we are to categorize them, we would come across two main groups: one emphasizing the ‘EU factor’ and the other pointing to the

‘Albania factor’. In their analysis regarding the relationship between democratization and Europeanization in Albania, the first group of studies focuses on the ‘EU factor’. Some stress EU’s interest in securitizing the region – “the EU seems to give more priority to stability and security issues than to democratic ones”⁴, in other words achieving what is called as a ‘minimum stability’ situation; others point to the EU’s miscalculations of the region’s peculiarities resulting in non-efficient contributions to it – “the incentive structure provided by the EU has not been sufficiently adjusted to the needs of a less developed transition country”⁵, and some others would go even further blaming the EU for the limited results achieved so far –

Albania’s democratization could have a different trajectory without the presence of the EU pushing for and directing reforms. Messages in the form of the EU reports, evaluations and critiques, which determine the progress in the contractual relations between EU and Albania, have become the signposts of change to the extent that they are the epicenter around which achievements and future challenges are debated and decided upon.⁶

On the other side, there stands the second group of studies which emphasize the ‘Albania factor’. Some scholars while praising the EU contribution – “the EU seems to be the best guarantee of democratization and progress in Albania”⁷, underline Albania’s domestic actors as the negative influence on the process – “the most crucial problem lies with the country’s political class, whose primary objective seems to be its

⁴ Elda Nasho, *Albanian Integration into the EU: Security, Europeanization, Democratization: Which Project for the Democracy?*, ECRP, Reykjavik, 2011, p.1.

⁵ Judith Hoffmann, ‘Integrating Albania: the Role of the European Union in the Democratization Process’, *Albanian Journal of Politics*, Vol. 1, No.1, 2005, p.55.

⁶ Arolda Elbasani, ‘Albania in Transition: Manipulation or Appropriation of International Norms?’, *South East European Politics*, Vol. 5, No.1, p.24.

⁷ Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *Albania and the European Union: the Tumultuous Journey towards Integration and Accession*, I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, London, 2007, p.241.

own self-interest and self-preservation”⁸; others point to Albania’s state capacity as the main obstacle for the furtherance of democratization and the European integration process in Albania –

Albania constitutes a *Janus-faced* applicant state - on the one hand legislators have accepted EU recommendations and sought to transpose and implement policy measures on the ground, on the other hand policy implementation has been clearly deficient, mainly because of recurring problems of inherent state capacity, political polarization and a distinct lack of political will.⁹

Adjacent to this category also falls the transitologists’ argument which claims that if integration is not yet realized or it is progressing at a very slow pace, it is because of domestic reasons.¹⁰

Starting from the conviction which regards the integration process as a two-sided mutual relationship, this study aims to provide an argument which surpasses the one-sidedness of the two categories mentioned above. As such, by analyzing both sides’ perceptions, stances, endeavors and achievements, it seeks to offer an insight of the nature of Albania’s journey to the EU - touching so upon the underlying incentives, ups and downs of the process, obstacles and possibilities, the distance travelled so far as well as the road lying ahead.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.240.

⁹ John O’ Brennan and Esmeralda Gassie, ‘From Stabilization to Consolidation: Albanian State Capacity and Adaptation to European Union Rules’, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol.11, No. 1, March 2009, p.61-62.

¹⁰ Mustafa Türkeş, ‘The Double Process: Transition and Integration and its Impact on the Balkans’, in Mitev, Petar-Emil, and Riordan, James, *Towards Non-violence and Dialogue Culture in Southeast Europe*, Iztok-Zapad Publishing House, Sofia, 2004, p.16.

Aiming to explain the dynamics of such a change in the international system and supporting the argument that the so far classic theories of integration “have exhausted their potential” as a facilitator for such an undertaking, this thesis is to rely on the neo-Gramscian perspectives as an alternative explanatory tool.¹¹ By their questioning of the socio-economic content and the underpinning power relations, neo-Gramscian perspectives show to be more concerned with the ‘content’ rather than the ‘form’ of integration, as such their usage is to offer a better insight in grasping the dynamics of the integration process.¹²

This study aims to show the significance of analyzing Albania’s ongoing integration process into the EU through the lenses of neo-Gramscian perspectives, as well as the resulting contribution of such an analysis to the International Relations discipline. In this context, this thesis puts the question as for the European integration process to be realized, should there be a hegemony on both sides or not?¹³ In other words, to what extent does a one-sided hegemony situation, be it on the Albania side or the EU one, guarantee an integration prospect for Albania?

¹¹ See Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, ‘A Critical Theory Route to Hegemony, World Order and Historical Change’, *Capital and Class*, No.82, 2004, p.85-113. ; see also Adam David Morton, ‘Social Forces in the Struggle over Hegemony: Neo-Gramscian Perspectives in International Political Economy’, *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture and Society*, Vol.15, No.2, April 2003, p.153-179.

¹² Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, ‘Neo-Gramscian Perspectives in International Political Economy and the Relevance to European Integration’, in Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, (eds.), *Social Forces in the Making of the New Europe: The Restructuring of European Social Relations in the Global Economy*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001, p.3-24.

¹³ For a definition of hegemony in the neo-Gramscian sense see Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, ‘A Critical...’ *op.cit.*; see also Thomas R. Bates, ‘Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol.36, No.2, April-June 1975, p.351-366; see also Christopher Chase-Dunn and others, ‘The Forum: Hegemony and Social Change’, *Mershon International Study Review*, Vol. 38, 1994, p.361-376.

What have been the endeavors on the part of Albania and how much have these been translated into tangible results? How has the fact of still undergoing transition affect the integration process? Are the two processes feeding each other or do they diverge? Does the EU have a specific strategy towards Albania? To what extent have the EU initiatives fit to the Albanian context? What is the current pace of the process and what are the challenges lying ahead? These are some of the questions this study aims to explore. It is not the purpose of this thesis to define or predict a date for Albania's accession into the EU, but rather the analyzing of the process as a whole is to be the focus of this research. In other words, while analyzing Albania's integration process through the lenses of the neo-Gramscian perspectives, this thesis seeks to explore the underlying reasons of Albania's prolonged integration.

Aiming to consider Albania's bid for the EU membership this study presents an analysis of the social forces in the country and shows the ongoing process of integration to be a result of an open-ended struggle. A pro-membership hegemonic perspective on the Albania side is seen to have arisen, but it is shown to be a very fragile hegemony indeed. Its 'fragility' is considered to be stemming not from the weakness of the cooperation among the social forces but rather from their own nature. Nevertheless, this very fragile hegemony is considered to be as not sufficient for the realization of Albania's EU integration process. On the other hand, an analysis of the EU's stance towards Albania's EU membership quest shows a lack of hegemony from the EU side. In such a context, this thesis assumes that for the realization of Albania's EU integration the existence of hegemony on both sides is to be considered as a 'must'.

The existence of hegemony on the one side, even though a very fragile one, and the lack of it on the other side proves to be not sufficient and therefore results in a prolonged integration process.

This introduction will be followed by some explanations regarding the neo-Gramscian perspectives, which stand for the theoretical framework for analysis throughout the thesis. Chapter 2 aims explaining the neo-Gramscian perspectives, by giving definitions and especially by focusing on the hegemony concept as an important element in analyzing the Albania-EU relations, and most importantly Albania's

continuous efforts in becoming part of the EU. Alongside the explanation of the neo-Gramscian perspectives, a presentation of other integration theories and approaches will also take place. It is in fact by showing the inability of the latter, that this chapter aims to shed light on the usefulness of elaborating on the hegemony concept in trying to explain the integration process.

Chapter 3 will present a picture of the historical evolution of the enlargement strategy since the early 1990's. It will discuss the conditionality change throughout the enlargement phases. What did the EU expect from the Central East European (CEE) countries, what from South East European (SEE) ones, and what is now expecting from the Western Balkans (WB)? Analyzing the shift in conditionality from just meeting the Copenhagen criteria, and then to the application of monitoring even after membership, and lastly to the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) will be at the center of discussion in this section. And not only that, but also understanding the underlying reasons of such a shifting conditionality will better serve the purpose of this thesis.

Chapter 4 goes straight to the heart of the research matter. It seeks to analyze Albania's journey to the EU read through the lenses of neo-Gramscian perspectives. In addition to providing a historical background of the Albania-EU relations, questions such as what are the social forces in Albania, what is their stance towards the integration process, can we talk about a hegemony situation in this regard; to what extent is their contribution affecting the process itself; what are the expectations from the Albanian government and what has been Albania's performance so far are among the priorities discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5 will focus on the EU stance and policies regarding Albania's quest for the EU membership. Is there any specific strategy of the EU towards Albania in particular? To what extent is the EU willing and able to offer Albania an integration prospect? These are some questions which deserve special attention. Crucial will also be the analyzing of the EU's feedback: its perceptions regarding Albania's current situation and the progress achieved so far, its definition of possible obstacles lying ahead, suggestions, prescriptions and proposals for the future. Said differently, how have the EU contribution and its feedback procedure influenced the Albania's

democratization and integration processes. In addition to that, a short review of the most recent discussions regarding the EU and the way the latter is headed to is to be presented. The multi-speed or two-tier Europe discussions are to be analyzed as well in this chapter. In other words, the way the debate about multi-speed Europe is to affect the Albania-EU relations is to be explored and analyzed.

As a last section, Chapter 6 in addition to providing an overview of each chapter's arguments, it will also make the concluding remarks regarding Albania's endeavors to attain the EU full membership and the degree to which these have been translated into tangible results, and in turn to the amount the latter are sufficient prerequisites guaranteeing the final goal ; said differently, the discussion goes like whether or not at the end of the day we can talk about any promising sign of Albania's quest for the EU membership.

CHAPTER 2

ASSESSING EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: INTEGRATION THEORIES AND NEO-GRAMSCIAN PERSPECTIVES

2.1 Introduction

The two World Wars and the devastation they brought to Europe emphasized the need for the eradication of international conflict and the attainment of peace and so paved the way for a closer cooperation between the European states.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the Cold War ensured for the integration to be confined just to Western Europe, rather than pan-European.¹⁵ Although arguments related to the idea of European unity go back to the 14th century Europe, the concrete steps undertaken in order to obtain a political and economic unity in Europe can be said to date back to 1945.¹⁶ In reality the post-war international system was the catalyst for the realization of regional integration in the Western Europe.¹⁷ The idea of European integration went hand in hand with the emergence of theoretical debates regarding the subject in question. As Rosamond mentions, “the emergence and development of the institutions of economic integration in Western Europe after the Second World War provided a valuable site for both the

¹⁴ Ben Rosamond, *Theories of European Integration*, St.Martin’s Press, New York, 2000, p.20-23.

¹⁵ Desmond Dinan, *Europe Recast*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Colorado, 2004, p.5.

¹⁶ Ali M. El-Agraa, *The European Union: Economics and Politics*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007, p. 23.

¹⁷ Michael O’Neill, *op.cit.*, p.7-11.

application of existing theories and the development of new perspectives.”¹⁸ Therefore, the European integration phenomenon can be said to have geared the existing theories and paved the way for the emergence of new ones as well, all with the purpose of providing a potentially proper analysis and explanation of the subject. In the attempt to analyze any subject, research and interpretation are essential and require a deeper analysis. Above all the investigations about the subject matter should be located in the right context.¹⁹ The same is true for the integration process. It is essential for us to situate it in the context of change in international and global conditions. In this case, it is possible for us to draw a certain relationship between the European integration process and the global conditions under which the former develops.²⁰ So, we can argue that European integration and globalization are simultaneously evolving processes which influence each other and as such should not be read independently or as autonomous from each other.

Aiming to explain the dynamics of a change in the international system, such as the European integration, this introduction is to be followed by an overview of the integration theories and the discussions they brought about. An assessment of their contributions and especially their short-comings will pave the way for the elaboration with the neo-Gramscian perspectives as a more proper explanatory tool for the above mentioned purpose.

¹⁸ Ben Rosamond, *op.cit.*, p.1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.14.

²⁰ For this see Helen Wallace, ‘Europeanisation and Globalisation: Complementary or Contradictory Trends?’, *New Political Economy*, Vol.5, No.3, 2000, p.369-382.; see also Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, ‘Neo-Gramscian Perspectives...’ *op.cit.*, p.3-24.

2.2 Integration Theories Analyzing European Integration

Even though European integration is a well-known phenomenon, the integration concept itself is a very contested one. There is a variety of definitions for the term of integration and a lack of consensus regarding its defining characteristics. “Integration is a concept whose meaning depends much more on agreeing a definitional consensus than it does on establishing any abiding or universal properties.”²¹ To Rosamond, European integration is a “never-ending process of politics, economics and security cooperation between nations, with the overall goal of the preservation of peace”.²² Groom and Heraclides define integration as “a much more process of becoming than a clear outcome or a definitive political end state.”²³ For Hughes and Schwartz, a systematic approach to the terminology of regional integration is needed and the process of international change should be subject to empirical testing.²⁴ Kahraman underlines Pentland’s stance towards the integration concept “as not a singular phenomenon or event but as a composite of related actions, joint outcomes and mutual responses to events within given historical situation.”²⁵ To conclude, it can be stated that European integration is a continuously evolving economic and political process encompassing a variety of social, political and economic interactions and cooperation between nations at the regional and supranational levels.

The theoretical approaches’ applications to the European integration in the early 1950s are defined by Haas as “pre-theories which have been imperfectly integrated”,

²¹ Michael O’Neill, *op.cit.*, p.11.

²² Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *op cit.*, p.17.

²³ Michael O’Neill, *op.cit.*, p.11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Charles Pentland, *International Theory and European Integration*, London, The Free Press, 1973, p.17 cited in Sevilay Kahraman, ‘Institutional Reform and Political Change in the European Community: From the 1950s to the 1980s’, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Middle East Technical University, 1996, p.9-11.

because they co-exist at different levels of abstraction, thus resulting in a non-additive character.²⁶ In discussing whether integration is a process, condition or both, Kahraman rightly draws the attention to the fact that “most of the approaches lie somewhere between descriptive and explanatory stages”.²⁷ Rosamond identifies four categories of the studies of European integration: “EU as an international organization, EU as an instance of regionalism; EU as useful location for the study of policy-making dynamics and EU as a sui-generis phenomenon.”²⁸

In this section the main premises of integration theories are summarized and then critically assessed. In order to do that there is a need to look through the main premises of the following theories: federalism, functionalism, neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism. This will enable us to point out the strengths and weaknesses of the integration theories and thus, move on to the neo-Gramscian perspectives as being a more powerful explanatory tool to analyze the Albania’s EU integration process and its quest for the EU membership.

2.2.1. Federalism

The first theoretical approach in the European integration studies is federalism. As an idea federalism is said to be rooted in the 17th century writings of Rousseau, Immanuel Kant and Jeremy Bentham, but it was attempted to be put into practice during the interwar period through the pan-European project of Kalergi.²⁹ Later on federalism is further discussed by Karl Deutsch, David Mitrany and Ernst Haas. Its main concern is the attainment of universal peace through the institutionalization of the link between

²⁶ Ernst B. Haas, ‘The Study of Regional Integration: Reflections on the Joy and Anquish of Pretheorizing’, *International Organization*, Vol.24, No.4, 1970 cited in Sevilay Kahraman, *op.cit.*, p.11.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.11.

²⁸ Ben Rosamond, *op.cit.*, p.14-15.

²⁹ Desmond Dinan, *op.cit.*, p.2-3.

states. Federalism presented a direct challenge to the nation state, as the latter was considered as the main source of conflict and in order to remedy this it suggested the creation of a regional federal government confined to certain geographical borders by establishing institutions with the aim of achieving peace.³⁰ For O'Neill it represents "the most radical expression of the supranational paradigm",³¹ whereas Rosamond argues that, "there is no clear-cut academic school of European federalism as a result of the fact that federalism has tended to be a political project, with particular goals in mind."³² Federalism's proponents in addition to emphasizing the important role of elites in the integration process, they also underline two main advantages of the federalist formula: first, the prevention of the capture of a system by anyone group and second, the federated state becomes a stronger unit in the face of external threat.³³ In discussing the main features of post-war federalism Kahraman concludes that the latter has now become synonymous with a general process of community building among states.³⁴ Although federalism was popular among the intellectuals, there is no indication that this was largely accepted by the European population. What is more is the fact that European sovereign states did not give their consent to the proposal of federalism, and thus federalism remains to be an utopic idea. The idea did not go beyond having some impact on the formation and functioning of the communities. It is a fact that the national actors remain to be aloof to the idea of transferring their sovereignty rights to supranational structures.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.21.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.23.

³² Ben Rosamond, *op.cit.*, p.23.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.26.

³⁴ Sevilyay Kahraman, *op.cit.*, p.13.

2.2.2 Functionalism

Functionalism, which is regarded more as an approach than a theory, like federalism is concerned with the limits of the nation-state's ability to maintain stability and peace.³⁵ Functionalist ideas mainly found in the writings of David Mitrany, prescribe ways of international cooperation between states via international organizations with the aim of attaining peace.³⁶ Functionalism can be considered as “a strategy for effecting cooperation and policy co-ordination between nation-states.”³⁷ Functionalism assumes that creation of a web of international functional agencies can pave the way for creating a more peaceful international environment and perform better economic cooperation among different potentially conflicting national actors.³⁸ Functionalists advocated the separation of economics from politics and argued that economic cooperation is a priority to address the conflicting situation and thus might create a better economic cooperation. And thus, economic integration would initiate a better peace. As will be noted in the below section, there would be some criticism on functionalism as being short-off the envisage of spillover effect.

2.2.3 Neo-functionalism

Neo-functionalism was an approach proposed as a remedy to functionalism as it saw the shortcomings of functionalism. Neo-functionalism criticized the assumption and outcome of functionalism as that while functionalism assumed and advocated the separation of economics from politics, neo-functionalism put emphasis on the integrity

³⁵ Ben Rosamond, *op.cit.*, p.32-33.

³⁶ Ben Rosamond, *op.cit.*, p.35-36.

³⁷ Michael O'Neill, *op.cit.*, p.31.

³⁸ Sevilay Kahraman, *op.cit.*, p.19.

of economics and politics.³⁹ It may be stated that neo-functionalism appeared as a result of the shortcomings of functionalism. The key contributor is Ernst Haas, followed also by Leon Lindberg, Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet. Neo-functionalism is mainly a theory of change and as such is concerned with the dynamics of the integration process.⁴⁰ At the center of neo-functionalist analysis there stand the “economic transactions and welfare needs as the real source of positive cooperation” and in neo-functionalists’ belief the real source of stability is the competition and conflict among groups and not the harmony of interest.⁴¹ Haas argues that integration was conceptualized as resulting from an institutionalized pattern of interest politics, played out within existing international organizations.⁴² While international organizations have a big say in the integration process, the role of national governments is more passive.⁴³ Very crucial to the neo-functionalist analysis of the integration process is the concept of spillover.⁴⁴ Rosamond defines spillover as “the way in which integration in one economic sector would create pressures for further economic integration within and beyond that sector, and greater authoritative capacity at the European level.”⁴⁵ To sum up, although neo-functionalism may seem to be a new step to overcome the shortcomings of functionalism, it was limited with the concerns of economic and political elite and did not address the deeper and larger concerns of the population at large. It does not look into the question of getting the consent of the organized and unorganized sections of the societies at large and in each of the European countries. It treats the

³⁹ Michael O’Neill, *op.cit.*, p.38.

⁴⁰ Sevilay Kahraman, *op.cit.*, p.22.

⁴¹ Michael O’Neill, *op.cit.*, p.38

⁴² Sevilay Kahraman, *op.cit.*, p.23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.23-24.

⁴⁴ Closely related to the spillover concept were also the concepts of ‘spill-back’, ‘spill-around’, ‘buildup’, ‘retrench’, ‘muddle-about’, ‘encapsulate = alternative actor strategies’ in Ben Rosamond, *op.cit.*, p.63-65.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.60.

European integration as if a matter of economic and political elite; this is the major weakness of neo-functionalism, and evidences show the fact that the envisage of spillover effect largely failed to be materialized. It may thus be stated that the explanatory power of neo-functionalism is not sufficient.

2.2.4 Intergovernmentalism

Intergovernmentalism is the kind of integration theory which preserves and sustains the autonomous position of the state; in that national governments and their interests are the ones to determine the scope and depth of integration.⁴⁶ For intergovernmentalists the role of national actors in the EC policy making is more important than that of institutions.⁴⁷ “Their view of the state as a monolithic actor enables them to see the member governments as gate-keepers between their domestic political systems and the Community”.⁴⁸ Kahraman argues that “...as a theory intergovernmentalism is designed primarily to explain stagnation of integration and views the Community as neither above nor below the nation-state, but alongside.”⁴⁹

On the one hand intergovernmentalism is not against European integration and thus promotes better cooperation between the national actors, however, it does not go beyond emphasizing the national interests. Intergovernmentalism puts more emphasis on the balance between European communities, though, recognizes the right of the sovereign actors to take the final decision. It is thus an approach which is based on the negotiations between national actors; therefore it is a renovated reproduction of the structure within which economic and political elites’ interests are materialized through negotiations between themselves. It does not go beyond the status quo based on the

⁴⁶ Sevilay Kahraman, *op.cit.*, p.203.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.204.

balance of power within the European context. Its explanatory power is insufficient regarding the larger concerns of the population.

2.3 Assessing Integration Theories

Integration theories apart from being appreciated for offering insights into the European integration process have also been prone to the criticisms of a variety of scholars. This thesis contends that the integration theories are insufficient in shedding light on the European integration process in that they have lost their salience and are not able to fully grasp the fluctuations of the Albania-EU relations.

Apeldoorn, Overbeek and Ryner argue that “the mainstream theories of European integration because of their conceptual design and assumptions are unable to achieve what should be the fundamental objectives of a political science of the European Union”.⁵⁰ In Peter Cocks’ terms, integration refers to “the geographical spread of state functions in response to the exigencies of capital accumulations and the realization of surplus value, on the one hand, and their associated legitimation problems, on the other.”⁵¹ Similarly, Stuart Holland contends that integration theories do not consider the fundamentally capitalist nature of the integration and the development of multinational capital in Europe.⁵² Bieler and Morton argue that “established theories of integration are unable to explain instances of structural change,

⁵⁰ Bastiaan Van Apeldoorn, Henk Overbeek and Magnus Ryner, ‘Theories of European Integration: A Critique’ in Alan Cafruny and Magnus Ryner (eds.) *A Ruined Fortress? Neoliberal Hegemony and Transformation in Europe*, Rowman and Little Filed, London, 2003, p.17.

⁵¹ Peter Cocks, ‘Towards a Marxist Theory of European Integration’, *International Organization*, Vol.34, No.1, Winter1980, p.15. see also Stephen Gill, ‘Structural Change and Global Political Economy: Globalizing Elites and the Emerging World Order’ in Yoshikazu Sakamoto (ed) *Global Transformation: Challenges to the State System*, UN University Press, Japan, 1994, p.192.

⁵² Ben Rosamond, *op.cit.*, p.83.

because they are deterministic and take existing power structures as given.”⁵³ So, not taking into consideration the structuration of power relations and not questioning them either, and at the same time neglecting the wider setting in which these are situated, makes it impossible for integration theories to take account of structural change. Such being the case, it can be stated that integration theories cannot properly explain the integration process indeed.

The federalist approach has been criticized for its reproducing the state on a different scale; in Mitrany’s words, “a federal system, within the limits of some new continental or regional group, would tend to divide the world again into a number of potentially competing units.”⁵⁴ Functionalism on the other hand has been criticized for separating economics from politics. Haas noted that, “power and welfare were far from separable. Indeed the commitment to welfare activities arose only within the confines of purely political decisions, which were made largely on the basis of power considerations.”⁵⁵ Bieler and Morton criticize neo-functionalism on two main grounds:

first, it is based on a ahistorical understanding of the human beings as rational, utility-maximizing individuals, as so implies that the notion of spillover is inevitable, a teleological process of further integration along a line of objective economic rationality; ...and second, it explains European integration through an emphasis on the internal dynamics of European politics. The wider structure is completely neglected. It is, therefore, impossible to take into account structural changes such as globalization and the end of Cold War.⁵⁶

⁵³ Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, ‘NeoGramscian ..’, *op.cit.*, p.5.

⁵⁴ Sevilay Kahraman, *op.cit.*, p.17.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.21.

⁵⁶ Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, ‘NeoGramscian ..’, *op.cit.*, p.13-14.

And as far as intergovernmentalism is concerned, Bieler and Morton, while pointing out that

intergovernmentalism takes into account the international setting of integration, they emphasize the fact that its exclusive focus on states in the international arena limits change to changes in the state structure. As such, structural changes such as globalization cannot be accounted for. In addition, the explanation is still deterministic, since states as the main actors can only adapt to structural changes and intergovernmentalism provides no answer for the particular choices made by states in response to structural change.⁵⁷

Integration theories by taking state-market separation as a starting point and neglecting the social relations of production end up leading to an ahistorical analysis which in turn lacks the ability to explain how the social relations shape interests and as such fail to take account of the socio-economic content and the purpose of integration.⁵⁸

2.4 European Integration through the Lenses of Neo-Gramscian perspectives

After the assessment of the integration theories, what follows is the argument that integration theories cannot fully understand the ongoing process of European integration and as such are unable to give a proper explanation for the Albania-EU relations. These theories are said to be deterministic and take existing power structures as given and therefore cannot explain instances of structural change. To remedy this, the

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.15.

⁵⁸ Andreas Bieler, 'Class Struggle over the EU Model of Capitalism: Neo-Gramscian Perspectives and the Analysis of European Integration', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, Vol.8, No.4, December 2005, p.514.

neo-Gramscian perspectives will be introduced as an alternative approach for the study of the EU integration and as such they are to provide the theoretical basis of this study.

Neo-Gramscian perspectives were introduced for the first time in 1980s by Robert Cox.⁵⁹ Four are their basic premises:

first, neo-Gramscian perspectives focus on social forces, engendered by the production process, as the most collective actors; ...second, they reject the notion of objective laws of history and focus upon class struggle as the heuristic model for the understanding of structural change; ...third, the state while still being considered as an important analytical category, it is regarded as a structure within which and through which social forces operate rather than an actor in its own right and fourth, neo-Gramscian perspectives take into account the independent role of ideas.⁶⁰

So, in a nutshell, neo-Gramscian perspectives by making the structural changes accessible, they enable the questioning of socio-economic content and power relations; conceive European integration as a result of an open-ended struggle among the social forces; pave the way for treating state-society relations as a form of social relation avoiding so any consideration of state centrism and emphasize the role of ideas in the overall process of European integration.

The starting point for neo-Gramscian perspectives is the sphere of production, but as Cox argues, production in the widest sense; therefore including the production and reproduction of knowledge, institutions and the social relations involved in the production of physical goods.⁶¹ The social relations of production in turn engender

⁵⁹ See Robert W. Cox, 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method', *Journal of International Studies*, Vol.12, No.2, 1983, p.49-66.

⁶⁰ Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, 'NeoGramscian ..', *op.cit.*, p.17-19.

⁶¹ Adam David Morton, 'Social Forces ..', *op.cit.*, p.155.

social forces which are regarded as the most important collective actors.⁶² This high emphasis on production and the class struggle as the model to understand change makes the uncertainty of the outcome of the integration process more clear.

Bieler argues that

neo-Gramscian perspectives are a critical theory because of: their rejection of economism and the related open-ended nature of historical development; the dialectical understanding of the relationship between structure and agency; the conceptualization of ideas as the representation of specific material interests which makes it possible to analyze how different interests and ideas are involved in specific instances of class struggle.⁶³

What differentiates neo-Gramscian perspectives from the integration theories is exactly their ability to analyze the social purpose of the social forces. As Cox argues, “neo-Gramscian perspectives do not take institutions and social and power relations for granted but calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in the process of changing.”⁶⁴

After having provided an introduction of the neo-Gramscian perspectives and their main premises, it is as well beneficial to have a look at some of the main concepts such as hegemony, historic block, passive revolution, as these are to provide a better lens to our understanding of the integration process.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Andreas Bieler, “Class Struggle ...”, *op.cit.*, p.518.

⁶⁴ Robert W. Cox, ‘Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Theory’, *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.10, No.2, 1981, p.129.

2.4.1 Hegemony Concept

While analyzing the hegemony concept, Cox identifies two strands for the origin of it: one is to be found in the debates within the Third International concerning the strategy of Bolshevik Revolution and creation of a Soviet socialist state and the other can be based on the writings of Machiavelli.⁶⁵ As far as the first origin is concerned, it describes how workers exercised hegemony over allied classes and dictatorship over the enemy ones. Gramsci's hegemony concept differs in fact from the Third International's one in that he applied it not only to the working class but even to the bourgeoisie, the apparatus and the dominant class.⁶⁶ This helped him understand whether the bourgeoisie had attained a hegemonic position of leadership over the other classes or not.⁶⁷ Closely related to this was the concept of civil society. To Gramsci, "civil society included the church, the educational system, the press and all the institutions which helped to create in people certain modes of behavior and expectations consistent with the hegemonic social order."⁶⁸

So, it is easy to see the relationship between the hegemony concept and the civil society one; in that for the former to be created the latter is of vital importance. In other words, the civil society is the one to nurture the very grounds of hegemony, and thus it is the one to provide for its spread among the population at large and as such it makes possible its realization.

Whereas for the second strand, the writings of Machiavelli and especially *The Prince* is said to mostly influence Gramsci. Drawing an analogy on Machiavelli's Prince, Gramsci would develop a modern version of a prince through which he hoped to find a way to unify the leadership and create a supportive basis for an alternative to

⁶⁵ Robert W. Cox, 'Gramsci, Hegemony...', *op.cit.*, p.50.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.51.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

fascism.⁶⁹ “Gramsci took over from Machiavelli the image of power as a centaur: half man and half beast, which was a necessary combination of consent and coercion.”⁷⁰ Both concepts are essential to hegemony; consent is necessary for the prevalence of it and coercion is to be used in deviant cases.

It is important to underline the specificity of Gramsci’s hegemony concept as compared to other definitions of the term. While conventional IR theory reduces hegemony to a single dimension of dominance based on the economic and military capabilities of states, “neo-Gramscian perspectives broaden the domain of hegemony. Hegemony appears as an expression of broadly based consent manifested in the acceptance of the ideas and supported by material resources and institutions.”⁷¹ It is this Gramscian definition of the hegemony concept which is to apply throughout this study.

2.4.2 Historic block

Historic block refers to a structure made of a variety of elements which combine together to form a larger unity. For Cox, “the historic blocks term applied to the particular configuration of social classes and ideology that gives content to a historical state and thus consists of structure and superstructure.”⁷² For Bieler and Morton it refers to the way in which social forces within a specific national context establish a relationship over contending social forces.⁷³ In other words, historic block is the solid structure resulting from constituting together the state and the society. As such, it

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.52.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, “A Critical Theory ...”, *op.cit.*, p.87.

⁷² Robert Cox, Production, *Power and World Orders: Social Forces in the Making of History*, Columbia University Press, New York 1987, p. 409.

⁷³ Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, “A Critical Theory ...”, *op.cit.*, p.92.

implies the existence of hegemony.⁷⁴ Essential for the hegemonic block is the existence of a hegemonic social class. Intellectuals have a very important role in the building of a historic block. To Gramsci, “intellectuals perform the function of developing and sustaining the mental images, technologies and organizations which bind together the members of a class and of a historic block into a common identity”.⁷⁵ There are two main types of intellectuals: bourgeois and organic intellectuals. “Bourgeois intellectuals are those who perform their duty in a society where the bourgeoisie is hegemonic, whereas organic intellectuals perform the same role in creating a new historic block under the working class hegemony within that society”.⁷⁶

Gramsci also identified three levels of consciousness in achieving hegemony and creating a historic block: first, economic-corporative; second, solidarity or class consciousness and third, hegemonic.⁷⁷ Intellectuals’ duty apart from producing ideas also includes the ability to organize forces they stem from and create what is called a “hegemonic project” and so, by transcending the interests of this group it can attain the consent of the other forces as well.⁷⁸ The basis for this hegemonic projects are organic ideas; ideas stemming from the economic sphere.⁷⁹ So, we can state that for a hegemonic project to be borne three main ingredients are needed: material reason, intellectual leadership and consent and coercion. Once these elements are present, the formulation of the hegemonic project is soon to be realized. Whether or not a historic block has yet arisen in Albania as far as the EU integration process is concerned is to be explored in chapter 4.

⁷⁴ Owen Worth, ‘The Janus-like Character of Counter-hegemony: Progressive and Nationalist Responses to Neoliberalism’, *Global Society*, Vol.16, No.3, 2002, p.298-299.

⁷⁵ Robert Cox, ‘Gramsci, Hegemony...’, *op.cit.*, p.57.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, ‘NeoGramscian ..’, *op.cit.*, p.21-22.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

2.4.3 Passive revolution

In Gramsci's terms, "a passive revolution is an introduction of changes which did not involve any arousal of popular forces".⁸⁰ It may either take place as *caesarism* or as *trasformismo*. *Caesarism* happens "when a strong man intervenes to resolve the stale mate between equal and opposite social forces".⁸¹ Whereas *trasformismo* is best described as "a strategy of assimilating and domesticating potentially dangerous ideas by adjusting to the policies of the dominant coalition and can obstruct the formation of class-based organized opposition to established social and political power."⁸² Cox identifies passive revolution concept as an acronym of the hegemony concept, in that it describes "the condition of a non hegemonic society".⁸³ He even went further to modify the concept of hegemony and argued that "international organizations are one mechanism through which the universal norms of world hegemony are expressed".⁸⁴

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed the European integration theories with the aim to better understand the European integration process as a whole so that to shed light on the Albania's ongoing integration into the EU structures. An introduction of the main premises of federalism, functionalism, neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism was provided with the aim of pointing out their ability in analyzing the EU integration process. This introduction was followed by an assessment of these theories, which in turn evidenced their shortcomings and proved them to be insufficient for such an

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.54.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.54-55.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.55.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.62.

undertaking. Such being the case, neo-Gramscian perspectives and their core premises were explained. Affluent in terminology and concepts, neo-Gramscian perspectives proved to be a better lens for the analysis of the European integration process. The hegemony concept alongside the historic block and passive revolution are to be considered as more effective in grasping the dynamics of the ongoing EU integration process and in providing a better explanation of the latter. This thesis tries to analyze the Albania-EU relations in the context where integration is considered as a hegemonic project; it questions the existence of hegemony on both sides and inquires whether or not a historic block has arisen around the topic and the extent to which this is translated into tangible results. The adoption of neo-Gramscian perspectives also enables this research to account for alternatives different from the hegemonic project in that it does not have to be permanent and can be defined and redefined over time.

CHAPTER 3

SHIFTING EUROPEAN ENLARGEMENT STRATEGIES

3.1 Introduction

Since its very creation in 1957⁸⁵ the EU has evolved and progressed a lot in the sense that it has continuously been subject to two processes; deepening and widening. Today the EU is said to be potentially a more prosperous, safer and stronger Union comprising 28 member states and a population of about 505 million people. “A growing membership has been part of the development of European integration right from the start. The debate about enlargement is as old as the EU itself.”⁸⁶ So far there have been seven enlargement phases⁸⁷ and it is not over yet. The Western Balkans (WB) countries are the next positioned in the list of the possible future enlargement of the EU. What most strikes is the evolution of the EU’s integration strategy involved in each enlargement phase. It is a fact that the Union has applied varying integration strategies in accordance with each enlargement phase. It may be stated that the EU has been imposing continuously expanding membership requirements on the applicant states and through time the relationship between the accession prospect and the criteria fulfillment has become more visible. It is by focusing on this shifting conditionality that we may put light on the future enlargement strategy of the Union. Analyzing and assessing the enlargement waves which the EU has undergone so far hopefully will give a hand in

⁸⁵ The Treaty of Rome, officially the *Treaty establishing the European Economic Community* (TEEC), is an international agreement that led to the founding of the European Economic Community (EEC) on 1 January 1958. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/emu_history/documents/treaties/rometreaty2.pdf

⁸⁶ European Commission, ‘Understanding Enlargement: The European Union’s Enlargement Policy’, 2007, p.1.

⁸⁷ The enlargements of year 1973, 1981, 1986, 1995, 2004 and 2007.

understanding what is considered to be as the Union's 'most effective foreign-policy tool'. Comprehending the way the EU's enlargement strategy works is considered to be essential in estimating its efficiency and effectiveness for future cases.

3.2 Historical Evolution of the European Union Enlargement

The signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957 by France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Italy established what was called the European Economic Community (EEC), also known as the European Community (EC). *The first enlargement* phase occurred as the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark joined the EC in year 1973 and so became the first new members of the group. *The second enlargement*, that referring to Greece's accession in 1981, was to be followed by *the third enlargement*, that of year 1986 when Spain and Portugal came to be members of the Community. Because of the many similarities between these three states and those in the nature of their accession processes, it is common to group the 1981 and 1986 enlargements together under the heading of the *Mediterranean Round*.⁸⁸ *The fourth enlargement*, also known as the *EFTAn Enlargement Round*, comprises the membership of Austria, Finland and Sweden realized in 1995. This was to be followed by what is known as the 'biggest ever' enlargement or the *(10+2) Enlargement Round*. *The fifth enlargement*, that of 2004, involved the accession of Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, whereas *the sixth enlargement*, the membership of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007 brought the number of the EU members to a total of 27. Croatia just recently, on July 1st 2013, became the newest member of the EU, becoming so the first country from the WB to be part of the Union.

⁸⁸ Neill Nugent, 'Previous Enlargement Rounds' in Neill Nugent (ed) *European Union Enlargement*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2004, p.22-33.

“There are three phases in the enlargement process: 1) associate status, 2) candidate status and 3) acceding country status.”⁸⁹ Apart from the acceding country of Croatia, the situation regarding the current status of the other WB applicant countries stands as follows. After the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, the EU reconfirmed the membership perspective for all of the WB countries.⁹⁰ Among the WB countries Croatia is the one which completed the process, signed the accession treaty and on July 1st 2013 became a member of the EU. Whereas the others are on the same track but on different stages of the process. Currently Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia enjoy the candidate status whereas Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo under the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 are considered as potential candidates.⁹¹

Sela and Maksuti, in their study of the enlargement process of the EU, categorize the enlargement waves as: 1973- the reconciling enlargement; 1981/86 - the post-dictatorial enlargement; 1995- the neutral enlargement; 2004/07 – the post-communistic enlargement and the future enlargement of the Western Balkans as the post-conflict enlargement.⁹² It is possible to say that this categorization is based on the nature of the negotiations and the conditions in which those negotiations were held. It is helpful in the sense it exposes to a certain extent the underlying purpose of each enlargement. Even though the motivations behind each enlargement phase might have

⁸⁹ Hellen Wallace, Mark A. Pollack, Alasdair R. Young, *Policy-Making in the European Union*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010, p.407.

⁹⁰ EU-Western Balkans Summit Thessaloniki, 21 June 2003. Available at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/76279.pdf

⁹¹ ‘On the Path to EU Membership’, EUINSIGHT, Issue.48, December 2010. Available at <http://www.euintheus.org/what-we-do/policy-areas/european-enlargement-neighborhood/accession-process/euinsight-enlarge-dec2010>. See also Kristin Archick, ‘European Union Enlargement’, *Congressional Research Service Report*, July 2nd 2013, p.1. Available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS21344.pdf>

⁹² Ylber Sela and Bekim Maksuti, ‘Future Enlargement of the EU - The Challenge Call Western Balkans and Turkey’, *Euracademia International Conference*, Vienna, 2011, p.2.

been similar, this has not refrained the peculiarities of the countries involved in each enlargement phase from being reflected in the way the process has been considered and displayed by the scholars. The deepening-widening relationship is seen to be a matter of debate for each and every enlargement phase and the way the two affect and influence one another is very much discussed as well. Cameron on the other hand in his categorization of enlargement waves underlines how the two processes, that of deepening and widening, go hand in hand.

Each round of enlargement has been accompanied by moves forward the process of integration. The first enlargement led to the EU adopting a regional policy and was preceded by a common fisheries policy. The second and third enlargements led to the single market, a stronger social policy, an increased commitment to solidarity with the poorer regions and greater powers for the European Parliament. The fourth enlargement followed moves towards economic and monetary union and new policy areas in foreign policy and justice and home affairs. Prior to its fifth enlargement, the Union introduced the single currency and is poised to adopt a new constitution that would mark a significant step forward in the process of integration.⁹³

It is of great value to underline the importance of how and to what degree these two processes, that of deepening and widening, feed each other; to some extent it can be considered as a mark of the Union's intentions content: willing to grow larger and get even closer.

⁹³ Fraser Cameron, *The Future of Europe: Integration and Enlargement*, Routledge, New York, 2004, p.1-2.

3.3 Assessing Enlargement Strategies

After providing an overview of the historical evolution of the EU enlargement, the different strategies that are applied by the EU during its enlargement waves will be discussed and analyzed in this section. With the aim of enabling ourselves to make predictions about future enlargements, a categorization of the rules and procedures followed so far during the previous enlargement waves is to be served. The question of whether there is a continuity in the EU's enlargement strategy or not, and if not what are the possible explanations to it is to be explored afterwards.

3.3.1 Early Phases of Enlargement

Early enlargement phases coincide with what is said to be “Union’s no strategy” for enlargement; meaning that so far there were no specific laid down rules and requirements to be fulfilled in order to obtain membership. What could be called an early-age enlargement scheme was to include a *formal application* to the European Council; followed by an *opinion (avis)* of the European Commission; an *accession conference* would precede the *negotiations* regarding the 35 chapters of the *acquis communautaire*, *agreement* upon which would lead to the *approval* by the European Parliament and all the process would be finalized with *ratification*.⁹⁴

Notwithstanding the ease of the rules and criteria employed in these early stages of enlargement, it is by no way fair to consider the process as one of ‘free of charge’. It can be claimed that rules and criteria for joining the Union were much more simple and easy compared to the future ones, but we should not forget that mainly all of these countries had already established liberal democratic regimes and market economy, and that’s why it was easier for them to adjust to European policies.⁹⁵ As Pridham notices,

⁹⁴ Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *op.cit.*, p.102-103.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.103.

there was some kind of conditionality in the early 60s in the case of the southern enlargement but it was kind of a “mild formal conditionality” in that the European Economic Community insisted for those countries only to have a constitution, competing party systems, free election and applied no monitoring during the phase of accession.⁹⁶ So the first enlargements, including that of 1995, can be said to employ fairly simple rules and procedures and keep far low expectations from the applicant countries when compared to the following enlargements.

3.3.2 Central Eastern Europe and South Eastern Europe Enlargements

For the new democracies of Eastern Europe, Europe Agreements⁹⁷ (EAs) were to be the new framework of the CEE countries’ accession path to the EU. “Europe Agreements were new accords aimed at strengthening of political and economic reform in the country and pave the way for their eventual membership.”⁹⁸ They were a turning point in the sense, “they formalized relations and created the institutional framework within which it has been possible to deepen relations.”⁹⁹ The procedure followed was dealing with each country individually and bilaterally in order to help them prepare for granting membership. ‘The preamble of the Europe Agreements read that the EU recognized eventual membership as the associates’ ‘final objective’ and this association

⁹⁶ Geoffrey Pridham, ‘Change and Continuity in the European Union’s Political Conditionality: Aims, Approaches and Priorities’, *Democratization*, vol.14, No.3, June 2007, p.451.

⁹⁷ The Europe agreements were association agreements between the EU and its Member States and the Central and Eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004/2007. They formed the legal framework for the accession process of these countries to the EU.

⁹⁸ Desmond Dinan, *Ever Closer Union: An Introduction to European Integration*, Palgrave MacMillan, London, 2010, p.146.

⁹⁹ Alan Mayhew, *Recreating Europe: EU’s Policy towards Central and Eastern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1998, p.21.

will help to achieve it.¹⁰⁰ This is in fact what differentiated Europe Agreements: their being programmed exactly in accordance with the need of the associated state. Still, they can be said to point to no clear link between the signing of the EA and the granting of membership.

The 2004 and later the 2007 enlargements made clear the direct relationship between accession prospect and criteria fulfillment.¹⁰¹ In Pridham's words, "EU's conditionality moved well beyond formal democracy criteria".¹⁰² In addition to well-specified political criteria - "*Stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect and protection of minorities*", economic ones - "*The existence of a functioning market economy, as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union*" and the administrative-technical criteria "*Ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union*", what highlights more the increasing difficulty of this enlargement strategy is the additional criterion - the requirement of being able not only to fulfill but also properly implement those criteria—"*The importance of not only incorporating the *acquis communautaire* into national legislation, but also ensuring its effective application through appropriate*

¹⁰⁰ Ulrich Sedelmeier, 'Eastern Enlargement Strategy or Second Thoughts', in Helen Wallace and William Wallace (eds.), *Policy-Making in the European Union*, 4th edition, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000, p.410.

¹⁰¹ The Copenhagen Criteria represent the following:

- Political – stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
- Economic – existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union;
- Acceptance of the Community *acquis* - ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union. – See other details at the Official Website of the EU - http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhagen_en.htm

¹⁰² Geoffrey Pridham, *op.cit.*, p.451.

administrative and judicial structures”¹⁰³ In other words, fulfilling the criteria meant no more uncontested membership. Accession would be realized when the Union was ready and able to accept new members, given the fact that the latter comply with all of the specified criteria. In other words, this new criterion points to the Union’s absorption capacity as an important variable in the integration process equation. This new approach went even further, as is the case of South Eastern Europe - Bulgaria and Romania, to not only expect fulfilling of the standards before accession, but also adding a new element, that of monitoring after the signing of the accession negotiations. “The EU offered a vision of integration into the transatlantic structures with an increased list of conditionality related to democratic standards and economic requirements of future members.”¹⁰⁴ This enlargement wave clearly emphasized the movement towards tougher criteria and harder membership procedures, and it even gave rise to a variety of explanations implying the Union’s further enlargement intentions.

3.3.3 The Western Balkans Enlargement

Whereas for the Western Balkans a new formula was derived; a strategy with a regional dimension making the accession process longer and more challenging – the Stabilization and Association Process decided at the Zagreb Summit in 2000.¹⁰⁵ With its two components; the Stabilization Association Agreement and CARDS, it would assess the progress of each country in fulfilling the Copenhagen Criteria through its screening

¹⁰³ Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *op.cit.*, p.104.(Article 6 and 49 of the EU Treaty)

¹⁰⁴ Andrew Moravcsik and Milada Anna Vachudova, ‘National Interests, State Power, and EU Enlargement’, *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol.17, No.1, 2003, p.47-48.

¹⁰⁵ Zagreb Summit, available at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/er/Declang4.doc.html

mechanism of political, economic and legal aspects and the pace of reforms would determine whether the country would be able to apply for the EU membership. “A country’s satisfactory track-record in implementing its SAA obligations will be essential element for the EU to consider any membership application.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, the signing of the SAA means itself nothing more than just gaining the permission of submitting an application. It does by no means imply accession and membership. Said differently, it may be considered as a ‘pre-negotiation conditionality’. This has been a contribution to the Stability Pact¹⁰⁷ for South Eastern Europe which was a framework on international cooperation in support of the Balkan region whose key objectives were: the creation of a secure environment, the promotion of sustainable democratic systems and the improvement of the economic and social situation in the Balkan region.¹⁰⁸ It is because of its recent history of war, ethnic conflict and instability, that the regional cooperation is deemed to be very essential for the opening of accession agreements. The SAP reflected the conviction that the Balkan countries faced different challenges and had to be treated under a specific policy framework, which was tailored to their particular situation.¹⁰⁹ Additional country-specific conditions can be said to

¹⁰⁶ Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *op.cit.*, p.105.

¹⁰⁷ The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe was launched in 1999 as the first comprehensive conflict prevention strategy of the international community, aimed at strengthening the efforts of the countries of South Eastern Europe in fostering peace, democracy, respect for human rights and economic prosperity. The Stability Pact provided a framework to stimulate regional co-operation and expedite integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

¹⁰⁸ Elke Thiel, ‘European Integration of Albania: Economic Aspects’, *Bamberg Economic Research Group on Government and Growth*, Working Paper No.49, 2004, p.2.

¹⁰⁹ Arolda Elbasani, ‘EU enlargement in the Western Balkans: Strategies of Borrowing and Inventing’, *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, Vol.10, No.3, 2008, p.306.

have been added to the WB enlargement framework.¹¹⁰ This might be called a ‘multi-dimensional’ conditionality. “The EU is strengthening its conditionality, control and pressure on the Western Balkans during the earlier stages of the pre-association and pre-candidacy process”.¹¹¹ To summarize, firstly in the case of the Western Balkans we see the Union apply a regional approach instead of one individually tailored according to each country. And what is more, additional intermediate steps are specified for the path of membership of these countries. This in turn emphasizes once more a tougher strategy for the accession process.

3.3.4 Shifting Conditionality

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, up to the present the EU comprises 28 members and a population of about 505 million. And still more countries are willing to be part of it. As Pridham states, “the special attraction of the EU membership, compared with that of other international organizations, above all explains this power of the EU to impose conditionality in return for accession prospects.”¹¹² The relationship between conditionality and enlargement is essentially a dynamic one, for the former has depended crucially on accession prospects and momentum.¹¹³ From one enlargement phase to the other we have seen how the strategies employed have changed

¹¹⁰ These criteria include full cooperation with the ICTY, compliance with the various peace agreements like Dayton and the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, respect for human and minority rights, the creation of real opportunities for refugees and internally displaced persons to return and a visible commitment to regional co-operation⁷ Commission of The European Communities, Report from the Commission, “The Stabilisation and Association Process for South East Europe, Third Annual Report”, Brussels, 30.3.2004, COM(2004) 202 final, p.5. available at http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2004/com2004_0202en01.pdf;

¹¹¹ Othon Anastasakis, ‘The EU’s Political Conditionality in the Western Balkans: Towards a More Pragmatic Approach’, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol.8, No.4, 2008, p.368.

¹¹² Geoffrey Pridham, *op.cit.*, p.446.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.450.

and evolved in accordance with the applicant countries. In Pridham's words we have experienced a "shifting conditionality". If we can talk about a shift from the "accession conditionality" strategy applied in the case of CEE to the "post-membership socialization" strategy applied in the case of Romania and Bulgaria, what can we predict the strategy for the Western Balkans to be"? What about other possible future enlargements? That being the case, the question that lies in front of us remains: why to employ continuously shifting strategies? What is the underlying purpose of this if there is any?

After being served such a picture of continuously shifting enlargement strategies one might not refrain himself from making a connection between the reasons for enlargement and the Union's capacity to cope with the latter. While trying to satisfy the expectations from the EU to take the lead in the region, get some possible economic profits and provide a more secure surrounding¹¹⁴, the Union has also had to face and deal with a variety of crises within itself. These contradictory stances have been reflected in the enlargement strategy enriching it with fluctuations and giving it a shifting character.

It is the premise of this thesis to consider the European integration process as not autonomous and independent one, but instead to place it in a context of change in the international and global conditions. In these regards, taking advantage from the lenses offered by the neo-Gramscian perspectives in analyzing the integration process at large; at the same time defining "integration as a market-oriented, neoliberal hegemonic project"¹¹⁵ and "enlargement as the expansion of the neo-liberal restructuring"¹¹⁶ and

¹¹⁴ Mustafa Turkes and Göksü Gökğöz, 'The European Union's Strategy towards the Balkans: Exclusion or Integration?', *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol.20, No.4, 2006, p.665-667.

¹¹⁵ Andreas Bieler, Adam David Morton, 'Neo-Gramscian...', *op cit.*, p.3-24.

¹¹⁶ Andreas Bieler, 'The Struggle over EU Enlargement: A Historical Materialist Analysis of European Integration', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol.9, No.4, August 2002, p.575-597.

taking into consideration that “it is in the nature of hegemony to be always contested, thereby defined and redefined”¹¹⁷, makes it easier to understand the shifting strategy the EU has been following so far. Viewed from this perspective, further changes in future enlargement strategies are considered to be more than possible.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to analyze the European Union’s enlargement strategies and by so doing, tried to shed light on its possible future tendency. It started with giving an overview of the so far realized enlargement phases aiming to provide a historical evolution of the EU. A picture of the current situation regarding the aspiring countries of the WB and their status in the EU enlargement process was also given. This was accompanied by a discussion on the relationship between the two processes of the European integration: deepening and widening, as this in turn is to be considered a possible mark of the Union’s future enlargement intentions. An analysis of the so far applied strategies during each enlargement wave was provided with the aim of exploring whether or not it can be talked about a continuity in the EU’s enlargement strategy. A categorization of the enlargement strategies showed to be characterized by a continuously shifting character; meaning utilizing different conditions and criteria for each enlargement phase. The underlying reason of such an engagement seems to lie with the very nature of the integration process. Being hegemonic means continuously being open to change and as such continuously evolving. So, in a nutshell, it is not possible to specify the future requirements or criteria the EU will set for accession countries to fulfill in order to attain membership, what is sure is the fact that the current set of criteria will possibly be followed by a new one or rather an ‘intensification’ of the existing.

¹¹⁷ Mustafa Turkes and Goksu Gokgoz, *op.cit.*, p.669.

CHAPTER 4

ALBANIA HEADED TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to analyze Albania's journey to the EU. A historical background of Albania-EU relations in time is to be provided with the aim of understanding the degree of influence these relations have had on Albania's democratic transformation, evaluating the so far achieved results as well as pointing out the challenges lying ahead for Albania. A general picture of the stances of all social forces in Albania regarding the integration process is believed to give an immense insight for the whole process itself. The way they perceive, react and more importantly participate in the integration process is to determine the real outcome of it. Said differently, integration is to be perceived as a result of an 'open-ended struggle' between the social forces. Therefore, it cannot be considered as a permanent decision but rather one which is continuously prone to change. In addition, this chapter puts the question of whether or not we can talk about a hegemony situation on the 'Albania side', in the sense that as far as the EU integration is concerned, do most of the stances if not all of them converge or not? In other words, it's the aim of this chapter to try to scrutinize whether that solid structure resulting from constituting together the state and society, also called the historic block, is realized or not. This in turn, is to point out the existence of a hegemonic pro-membership perspective, the social forces behind that and at the same time the possibility of any alternative different from the hegemonic one. In such a context, assessing the expectations and evaluating the performance of Albania provides a hint for a better understanding of the Albania's EU integration process.

4.2 Historical Background of Albania-EU Relations

Till the early 1990s it was impossible to talk about any external relation of Albania with any other country as it was under complete isolation, but as mentioned earlier in this thesis the overthrow of the PLA rule paved the way for Albania to open itself and establish new ties with foreign countries. Previous studies have tended to categorize Albania-EU relations in accordance with the EU's assistance to the country but this research differentiates between two main stages of this relationship; that before the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) and the period after that. This categorization would open space for assessing the importance and the contribution of the SAA signing to Albania's democratic transformation in addition to providing a profile of the so far undertaken reforms and the degree the latter have been translated into tangible results for Albania.

4.2.1 Pre-SAA Period – The Preparatory Stage

Albania started diplomatic relations with the EU in 1991, immediately after the overthrow of the communist party rule but the first ever agreement signed between Albania and the EU is the Cooperation and Trade Agreement in 1992.¹¹⁸ As a matter of fact, the agreement not only promised for closer relations between the two in the future, but also made Albania eligible for funding under the PHARE¹¹⁹ Programme which indeed was very much needed during the transition period. This was supposed to be followed by another contractual agreement in 1996 but the national developments in

¹¹⁸ The agreement was signed on May 11th 1992 but entered into force in December 1992.

¹¹⁹ The PHARE Programme was originally created in 1989 to assist Poland and Hungary and later expanded to other countries in CEE and South-East Europe. Until 2000, Albania was as well eligible for funds under the PHARE Programme. The total amount of PHARE Funds allocated to Albania for the period 1991-2000 reached 631.5 million Euro.

Albania during the period made this attempt to be doomed to failure.¹²⁰ In 1997 the EU undertook two initiatives, the Royamount Process¹²¹ and the Regional Approach, both with the aim of promoting regional cooperation and good neighboring. But it was exactly in the latter where the Union established a political and economic conditionality for the development of bilateral relations. This situation is also referred as an ‘exceptionally detailed conditionality for the Western Balkans’¹²²; an expression used to underline the fact that a new strategy, one which tied democratic conditions with the advancement of bilateral relations was to be put in practice as far as the Western Balkans were concerned. These two initiatives seem to highlight the argument held by many scholars that behind the EU’s involvement in the region there lie its security interests – “the EU seems to give more priority to stability and security issues than to democratic one”¹²³- in other words the EU is trying to achieve what is called as a ‘minimum stability’ situation. A further measure which stresses the same line of thinking is also the launching of the Stability Pact (SP) in the Sarajevo Summit in 1999.¹²⁴ “The SP is a conflict-prevention policy aimed to address the roots of the conflict through promoting peace and democracy.”¹²⁵ The EU’s priority in securitizing

¹²⁰ Christopher Jarvis, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Pyramid Schemes in Albania’, *IMF Working Paper*, No.98, July 1999, p.17-18.

¹²¹ For Royamount Process connect to <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:1998:302:0001:0007:EN:PDF>

¹²² Arolda Elbasani, ‘The SAP in the Balkans: Overloaded Agenda and Weak Incentives?’, *EUI Working Paper SPS*, No.3, 2008, p.7.

¹²³ Elda Nasho, *op.cit.*, p.1.

¹²⁴ The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe was launched in 1999 as the first comprehensive conflict prevention strategy of the international community, aimed at strengthening the efforts of the countries of South Eastern Europe in fostering peace, democracy, respect for human rights and economic prosperity. The Stability Pact provided a framework to stimulate regional co-operation and expedite integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

¹²⁵ Arolda Elbasani, ‘The SAP in the Balkans...’, *op.cit.*, p.7.

of the region argument comes once more to the fore. But the analysis of the “EU’s side of the story” is the theme of the next chapter, as such it is to be debated at a later point. What needs to be stressed is that at the time being Albania was undergoing a political, economic and social crisis due to the collapse of the pyramid schemes and being part of these initiatives can be said to not only have helped it get through its internal crisis but at the same time it has given Albania the chance to prove itself in the region as a ‘contributor’ to or a ‘provider’ of security and stability of the region.

Year 1999 signs the proposal of the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) regarding the five countries of South East Europe, which was to be officially launched in 2000 in the Zagreb Summit ¹²⁶ and finalized in the Thessaloniki Summit ¹²⁷ in 2003 as the new EU policy for the Balkans; in other words the SAP was to become the enlargement framework specific to the Western Balkans. It was with the SAP when the EU included for the first time together with the principle of conditionality the promise of a future membership.¹²⁸ In Feira 2000,¹²⁹ the European Council declared that the SAP countries are to be considered as “potential candidates” for EU membership. “The future of the WB lies within the EU.”¹³⁰ In 1999 Albania also benefited from the Union’s Autonomous Trade Preferences. In 2000 after an extension of duty-free access of EU market for Albanian products, the EU in 2001 decided to undertake negotiations

¹²⁶ See Zagreb Summit Final Declaration, available at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/er/Declang4.doc.html

¹²⁷ See EU-Western Balkans Summit, Thessaloniki, 21 June 2003, available at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_PRES-03-163_en.htm

¹²⁸ Arolda Elbasani, *The SAP in the Balkans...*, *op.cit.*, p.13-15.

¹²⁹ See Feira Summit available at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/fei1_en.htm

¹³⁰ At the summit in Brussels in March 2003, the President of the European Commission Romano Prodi said that the future of the Western Balkans is in the European Union, and that the unification of Europe will not be complete until such time as these countries do not join European Union.

with Albania on a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) which together with CARDS counted for the two most important components of the SAP as a whole. With the aim of intensifying the cooperation with Albania a High Level Steering Group was created, that followed by the Joint Consultative Task Force which would assist in drafting a mandate for the SAA.¹³¹ The negotiations were officially launched in January 31st 2003. The following year the Council decides on a First European Partnership for Albania, this followed by a revised one in January 2006. In the same year in May the EC-Albania Readmission Agreement¹³² entered into force and one month later in June 2006 Albania signed the SAA.¹³³

This preparatory stage can be stated to be something between the EU and the Albanian government; in which the latter seems to be very willing in furthering and strengthening these relations with the EU as quickly as possible. Indeed, the underlying purpose of this willingness can be said to lie with the possibility of profiting from the EU aid and assistance that such a relationship provided.

4.2.2 Post-SAA Period – The Pre-Negotiations Stage

With the signing of the SAA, the Interim Agreement¹³⁴ which prescribed the trade related provisions entered into force in December 2006, this followed a month

¹³¹ Valbona Kuko, ‘Stabilization and Association Process in Albania and Institutional Framework’, *European Integration Directory*, Dec.2003, p.6. Available at http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00002096/01/dec_2003_V_Kuko.pdf

¹³² Imke Kruse, ‘EU Readmission Policy and its Effects on Transit Countries - The Case of Albania’, *European Journal of Migration and Law*, No.8, 2006, p.115-142.

¹³³ See The SAA – Albania, available at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/albania/st08164.06_en.pdf

¹³⁴ See The Interim Agreement – Albania, available at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/albania/st08154.06_en.pdf

later by the entry into force of the new Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA).¹³⁵ Whereas an IPA Framework Agreement was signed in October 2007, a Visa Facilitation Agreement was signed in September 2007 but that was to be entered into force only in January 2008. Full visa liberalization was to be realized on December 15th 2010. The SAA ratification process was completed by all member states on January 14th 2009 and on April 1st of the same year the agreement entered into force. Following this on April 28th 2009 Albania submitted its application for the EU membership, an application that was to undergo the standard procedures and was followed by a Commission's assessment report on the country's readiness for the starting of the accession negotiations. The European Commission in its 2010 Opinion on the Country's European Union Membership outlined twelve 'application – conditions' that Albania still has to meet before it can be accepted as an EU candidate.¹³⁶ The report pointed out Albania's unreadiness for the undertaking of such a step and indeed specified '12 key priorities'¹³⁷ on which the country should focus on. Not only didn't the Albanian government and leadership question the genuineness of the specified priorities but they silently accepted them, and what is more, an action plan for addressing the '12 key priorities' defined by

¹³⁵ Since 2007, the European Union introduced a new instrument in the financial perspective 2007–2013, called the Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). IPA is a single legislative framework replacing all the previous EU instruments and programmes supporting Western Balkans. It is applied to the EU candidate and potential candidate countries of the Western Balkan Countries (WBC) and Turkey. Since its establishment, IPA became the driving force to assist these countries in adjusting their system in compliance with the European standards and policies in their accession perspective. In this regard, IPA is an instrument that supports countries in meeting political and economic criteria and to approximate their national legislation with that of the EU.

¹³⁶ European Commission, Albania 2010 Progress Report, Brussels, 10/10/2010, available at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2010/package/al_rapport_2010_en.pdf

¹³⁷ For a detailed information on the 12 key priorities see 'EU Info Center', available at... <http://euinfocentre.al/imgeng/euic.pdf>

the Union for Albania was adopted in June 2011.¹³⁸ Progress is achieved but still much remains to be done.¹³⁹

It can be stated that there is no serious discussion on behalf of the content of the integration process, but still the Albanian part shows itself to be really thirsty to be integrated into the EU.

To Albania, the EU membership is not only the endeavor of ‘return to Europe’, but at the same time it is equalized with a better and promising future for all Albanians.¹⁴⁰ In these regards, the EU membership issue has not only been part of the political agenda of the politicians but it is also reflected in the whole institutional structure built with the purpose of facilitating and accelerating the process as a whole. For sure the degree the latter proves to be a satisfactory condition is a matter of debate, but to some extent it is indeed an indicator of the endeavor discussed. In this regard, the Albanian government has built a new institutional set up comprised of the Ministry of European Integration, an Inter-Ministerial Committee, the Directorate of Legislation Approximation, the General Directorate for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation, a dozen of state secretaries and ministers in charge of EU affairs and so on.¹⁴¹ All this goes

¹³⁸ 10 June 2011 - The Albanian Government adopts the Action Plan addressing the 12 key priorities of the EC Opinion regarding the proper functioning of Parliament, strengthening the rule of law, accomplishment of the public administration reforms, fighting corruption and against organized crime, strengthening property rights, reinforcing the protection of human rights and improving the treatment of the detainees.

¹³⁹ European Movement Albania, ‘Policy Brief 12 key priorities for Albania: *Where do we stand?*’, October 2011, available at <http://www.emal.org/?fq=artikuj&gj=gj2&bir=26>

¹⁴⁰ For this see ‘Putting People First: Views and Comments from Albanian Politics and Citizens’ Priorities’, Findings from Focus Group Research in Albania, Dec. 2012, p.3-6.

¹⁴¹ Valbona Kuko, *op.cit.*, p.3-4.

simultaneously hand in hand with the different monitoring instruments set up specifically for measuring progress.

To lead and assist and follow up the Stabilization and Association process, the Albanian Government undertook the preparation of *the Strategic Plan for the European Integration*, (May 2002). By determining the strategic goals, the main aim of this plan was to determine strategic priorities, long, medium and short-term objectives, accompanied by a detail matrix of respective measures to implement the objectives.¹⁴² EU-Albania negotiations on the Stabilization and Association Agreement are organized every six weeks, one political round followed by two technical rounds, a calendar which was determined at the opening of the negotiations. Seventh negotiation rounds have been held so far, of which three political rounds and four technical rounds.¹⁴³

October 2011 witnessed for a second time in a row the rejection of the country's bid for official EU candidacy.¹⁴⁴ Albania is now expecting the Commission's Opinion more optimistic than ever. Believing the candidacy status to be a merit-based 'promotion' and confident about its progress, Albania feels this is the right time to have it. The position of Albanian government is indeed one which also increases the

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.6.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.7.

¹⁴⁴ For this see http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2010/package/al_opinion_2010_en.pdf; see also Svetlana Jovanovska and Augustin Palokaj, 'Albania is refused EU candidate status', Nov.10th 2010, available at <http://euobserver.com/news/31237> accessed on 25 November 2012.

expectations of the population at large. Yet, it remains to be seen whether the EU Commission will respond positively to this quest.

To sum up, it can be said that the relations between Albania and the Union have always been smooth but the signing of the SAA has clearly brought the two closer. The pre-SAA period is characterized more by relations concerning the security and economic issues whereas the post-SAA period touches upon the economic spectrum as well as the political one. Overall, the signing of the SAA has opened more space for the Union to be involved in the country and rightly set ‘the rules of the game’; rules which Albania is willing to abide as it is aspiring to become a future member of the EU. The *problematique* lies within the fact whether these rules are to be adopted in form or content, or the degree this rule adoption might possibly lead to the desired end. Whatever the case might be what is to be of immense importance is the fact whether this whole rule adoption might be recorded as a progress for Albanians and if so to what extent. The answers to all these questions remain to be open-ended. Indeed, it is believed in Albania that it is the EU which determines the end-result. Here it may be seen the fact that on the one hand the expectations on the part of the Albanian population is high and on the other hand it is believed that the power lies in the hands of the EU. This paradox continuously exists in the Albania-EU relations. How this is reflected in their everyday lives and how they react to this phenomenon is the right question to be asked.

4.3 Albanian Social Forces Considering Integration

For Albania the EU integration process is a priority among the other policy goals, and as a policy-making process is expected to be all-inclusive in terms of the actors involved in it; so is to be the case for the EU integration as well. Together with the desire and the intention of becoming an EU member there lie the responsibilities for undertaking the required reforms in these regards. The reform process in turn is to be

carried out not only by the governmental bodies. Nevertheless, a co-operation between all the actors, be them political or administrative and especially the wider forces of the civil society, is deemed to be essential for the furtherance of reforms and the achievement of results.

As noted before Albania lacked that essential social force in its transition to democracy, an inheritance of the communist party rule period which made the elimination of the upper and middle class its priority.¹⁴⁵ For the Albanian case, it was the students and not the intellectuals the ones who led the overthrow of the communist party rule, despite the fact the latter were not totally absent in the Albanian society. They were in the form of what is called as “*intelligentsia*- intellectuals who were to a large extent brainwashed, mediocre and passive, but also blindly loyal to and closely integrated into the Party of Labour.”¹⁴⁶ “The early 1990s found Albania without an experienced liberal elite to lead the transition process.”¹⁴⁷ And in these conditions the building of such an elite was to be a real challenge for the country, but also a necessity indeed.

Pridham defines national elites as “top post-holders in the largest political, governmental, economic, military, professional, communications and cultural organizations... who are able, by virtue of their authoritative positions in powerful organizations and movements of whatever kind, to affect national political outcomes

¹⁴⁵ Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *op.cit.*, p.170-171.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.171.

¹⁴⁷ Blendi Kajsii, ‘Albanian Political Parties- Amidst Dilemmas and Challenges: A Country Report’, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Tirana p.14, in Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *Albania and the European Union*, I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, London, 2007, p.171.

regularly and substantially.”¹⁴⁸ Moving from this definition now let us have a look at the Albanian elites and their stances towards the EU integration process.

4.3.1 Political Parties and Leaders

One of the most influential key actors throughout the democratization process in Albania have been the political parties. So is the case for the EU integration process. EU membership is an inseparable part of the agendas of all political parties, be them left-wing or right-wing parties.¹⁴⁹ “At the same time, ideological differences between the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party are extremely slight. Integration with Europe tops the official agendas of both parties.”¹⁵⁰ “EU integration for Albania is not just a goal, it is a way of being, a way of living.”¹⁵¹ “EU membership means a lot to Albania. It means consolidation of peace, a strengthening of stability and economic prosperity.”¹⁵² This behavior of theirs has been prone to criticisms of many scholars, some believing that the discussion of ‘there is no alternative to EU integration’ is being used more for propagandistic ends. “The orientation of the Albanian political elite

¹⁴⁸ Geoffrey Pridham, ‘The Dynamics of Democratization : A Comparative Approach’, London and NY: Continuum, 2000, p.143, in Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *Albania and the European Union*, I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, London, 2007, p.172.

¹⁴⁹ For this see SP Programme available at <http://www.ps.al/files/programi/Ribashkim-me-Europen.pdf> and DP Programme available at <http://perpara.al/ceshtjet/politika-e-jashtme>.

¹⁵⁰ Ulrike Stern and Sarah Wohlfeld, ‘Albania’s Long Road into the EU: Internal Political Power Struggle Blocks Central Reforms’, *DGAP Analyse*, September 2012, No.11, p.8.

¹⁵¹ SP Leader Edi Rama, Interview with Janusz Bugajski, “Bugajski Hour” on Albanian Screen, June 15th 2012, Tirane, Albania.

¹⁵² SMI Leader Ilir Meta, Interview with Janusz Bugajski, “Bugajski Hour” on Albanian Screen, June 22nd 2012, Tirane, Albania.

towards Europe is not because they are idealistic but by playing the card of integration into the EU, their sole aim is to legitimize and prolong their power.”¹⁵³ A very characteristic of Albanian politics has been the strong political polarization since the elections of 2009.¹⁵⁴ Despite a deep polarization of the political party life in the country, they all profess EU integration as the most essential section in their agendas. “To date, the biggest test of the Democratic Party (DP) and the Socialist Party’s (SP) ability to cooperate after the SP’s return to parliament in the fall of 2011 has been the presidential elections that took place in May and June 2012.”¹⁵⁵ “After a long tug of war, a blockade on the part of the opposition, and international pressure, a candidate prevailed.”¹⁵⁶ Another characteristic of the Albanian political life is that it has mostly been dominated by the same political leaders since the very first start of the transition process. This leads to a continuation of the same attitude and explains the lack of new figures in the Albanian political scene. “A vital exchange of elites has not taken place. Many political actors who have taken to the political stage over the last 20 years were socialized within the communist system.”¹⁵⁷ Sali Berisha, considered as one of the key leaders of the Albanian political scene and who remained in power the longest term, in an interview asked when he planned to retire from active politics and give space for new actors, replied: “I will quit the day that Albanians will not vote me anymore.”¹⁵⁸ Whatever the underlying reasons of such an advocacy for the cause of membership might be, what

¹⁵³ Ali Vehbiu, ‘Deshira per Europe’, Bota Shqiptare, Rome, October, 2003 in Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *Albania and the European Union*, I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, London, 2007, p.147.

¹⁵⁴ Ulrike Stern and Sarah Wohlfeld, *op.cit.*, p.8-9.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.9.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.12.

¹⁵⁸ Ex-DP Leader Sali Berisha, Interview with Janusz Bugajski, “Bugajski Hour” on Albanian Screen. January 20th 2013, Tirane, Albania.

counts more is the fact that these actors, despite differences in their political orientation, are all in favor of the EU membership and profess it to be as a unique opportunity for the country's development.

4.3.2 The Governing Actors

While picturing the relations among the EU and Albania in time, a short overview of the institutional set up built by the governmental bodies with the aim of facilitating and accelerating the integration process was also given. In this regard, the efforts spent by the governing actors, be it the government, the parliament or the president, in this direction are noticeable. Of course the fulfilling and implementation of the 12 key priorities set by the Union remains the biggest challenge for the government. Still, for the Albanian government as the Prime Minister Berisha outlines,

No doubt, the EU integration is for this nation the most major project after NATO integration. So the government is absolutely committed to make any reform, all efforts to reach norms, standards, criteria, which at the end of the day make this nation more free, more prosperous, more secure.¹⁵⁹

The performance of the parliament has been considered as “problematic”, in the sense that the political polarization situation has negatively affected the well-functioning of the institution as the opposition has boycotted it for a very long time. “The contested elections of 2009 and the subsequent boycott of the opposition have hampered the functioning of the parliament which has since degenerated into a forum for quarreling rather than a mechanism for control over the executive.”¹⁶⁰ Just recently

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2012 – ACR, Gutersloh: B.S, 2012, p.8-9.

three important laws were voted in the parliament¹⁶¹; this was one of the ‘12 key priorities’ set by the Union in its 2010 Report, and this in turn can be considered a new light for Albania’s fulfilling the criteria and getting on the road to achieve the ‘candidate’ status. The June 2013 parliamentary elections are to be a very important determinant for the country’s future development and its reputation of a functioning liberal democracy. Indeed, these elections which resulted in a victory for the opposition party (SP) are considered by the international actors as the ‘best ever’ elections in the political history of Albania.¹⁶² Apart from the appraisal for the election process, other more positive signals regarding the candidacy status can be said to be on the way.¹⁶³

Although Albania is a parliamentary republic, the role of the president is important in that it represents a leader above party politics. Even though the last presidential elections were contested by the opposition¹⁶⁴, the newly elected president, Mr. Bujar Nishani declares that he will try his best in trying to neutralize the still ongoing polarization of the political debate and contribute to the strengthening of the judicial system and the independence of the institutions as he thinks the president can play a role of gap bridging, can be an open door to all political parties and promote such a spirit of debate and communication between the political parties.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ MAPOonline, ‘Miratimi I tre ligjeve’, Wollfarth: Hapen Rrugen drejt Reformave, 21 Korrik 2013, available on <http://mapo.al/2013/05/30/miratimi-i-tre-ligjeve-wollfarth-hapen-rrugen-drejt-reformave/> accessed on 21 Korrik 2013.

¹⁶² Andrew Gardner, EU praises Albanian elections, June 25th 2013. Available at <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/2013/june/eu-praises-albanian-elections/77641.aspx>, accessed on June 25th 2013.

¹⁶³ Valentina Madani ‘Sequi: Statusi edhe I mundur’. Available at <http://www.balkanweb.com/lajmesot/2707/ambasadori-sequi-statusi-per-shqiperine-i-mundur-edhe-brenda-vitit-141779.html>,

¹⁶⁴ Ulrike Stern and Sarah Wohlfeld, *op.cit.*, p.10.

¹⁶⁵ Bujar Nishani-President of Albania, Interview with Janusz Bugajski, “Bugajski Hour” on Albanian Screen.

in the support rate from 99% in 2002 to 83% in 2005.¹⁶⁸ This is explained to be as a result of the increasing awareness of the costs of integration and the complexity of the process itself. Deep criticism exists on behalf of the Public Administration (PA) officials though. “The functioning of public administration is constrained by high levels of clientelism and politicization, as well as a lack of professional skills and an ethos of civil service on behalf of the bureaucracy.”¹⁶⁹ The de-politicization of the PA is stressed as an immediate need for Albania’s reforms progress. It is a fact that in Albania all PA officials are to be elected by the government and a rotation of which is to lead to a total substitution of them. Such being the case, it is expectable for PA officials to strongly support the goals specified by the government. Nevertheless, survey polls show a decrease in such a support. Whether this is something pointing to a decrease in the government’s commitment towards the EU integration process or is it a criticism produced by the bureaucracy itself remains to be an open-ended question as there is no sufficient information regarding this topic. All in all, the fact is that there is a decrease in the support for the EU integration among the PA officials. This might be a result of a ‘general tiredness’ of the PA itself.

4.3.4 NGOs

Another inheritance of the communist party rule is also the lack of a tradition of autonomous group activities, be it independent social organizations or associations. This situation, scholars argue, was to be furthered by a lack of governmental support and autonomy from the state even in the early years of transition.¹⁷⁰ Currently the number of

¹⁶⁸ Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS), *Survey ‘Rethinking European Integration: Perceptions and Realities’*, Tirane 2005, p.6. Available at <http://www.aiis-albania.org/PDF/2004-PR-ENG.pdf>

¹⁶⁹ Ulrike Stern and Sarah Wohlfeld, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁷⁰ Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *op.cit.*, p.187.

registered NGOs is around 1,600, although only 150 to 200 are estimated to be active.¹⁷¹ NGOs cover different sectors including human rights, the environment, women's issues, education, youth issues, culture, religion, health care issues, disabled and minority rights. Some NGOs have successfully engaged in advocacy work, covering important monitoring roles and providing expertise that educational institutions are not able to provide.¹⁷² Initiatives of some NGOs in building community platforms have shown Albanians to become increasingly interested in participating in local community activities.¹⁷³ Nevertheless, the concept that citizens themselves control those who govern and can thus determine the country's direction has not been fully established.¹⁷⁴ Civil society actors are seen to play a minor role in the political process. "Although there are around 1600 NGOs in the country, there is a lack of formal mechanisms and experience with including them in political decision-making processes."¹⁷⁵ "The NGO sector has grown considerably according to availability of external funding, which has poured in especially during crisis periods. The country's weak civic traditions and dependence on foreign funds, however, count for a generally weak capacity of civil action."¹⁷⁶ Albanian NGOs' weak nature and their dependency on foreign assistance open space for questioning the possible link between the foreign donors' agenda on the one hand and the necessities of the Albanians on the other. "Very often civil society in Albania is seen as a cluster of donor-driven NGOs rather than

¹⁷¹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI, *op.cit.*, p14.

¹⁷² Gledis Gjjipali, 'Albania', *Nations in Transit*, 2012, p.55.

¹⁷³ For this see 'Civic Forum' National Democratic Institute for International Affairs - From Monologue into Dialogue, p.1. Available at http://www.ndi.org/files/1631_al_communplatform_073103.pdf

¹⁷⁴ Ulrike Stern and Sarah Wohlfeld, *op.cit.*, p.11-12.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.11.

¹⁷⁶ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI, *op.cit.*, p.7.

genuinely local interest groups and grassroots movements in touch with local priorities.”¹⁷⁷ In such a context, the credibility of the NGOs among the population at large remains to be weak.¹⁷⁸ Lately involvement of NGO activists in politics has become a trend in Albania. It is maybe because they view it as the most effective way to influence policy-making.¹⁷⁹ “There is a lot of overlap between staff in politics and civil society.”¹⁸⁰

As far as the EU membership question is concerned, the NGOs’ support rate scores the highest, 100%¹⁸¹, still their presence is not actively felt. Indeed, the EU is widely accepted as the best mechanism in mitigating the country’s problems.¹⁸² The existing politicized environment also makes it difficult for the NGOs to operate and leaves no space for them to be active enough. Nevertheless, with the recently established Agency for Support to Civil Society possible improvements are to be expected.

To sum up, even though affluent in number and rich in the variety of areas they work on, the Albanian NGOs are not very active in the political decision-making process. As such, their high support rate regarding Albania’s EU membership remains to be far from materialized.

¹⁷⁷ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI, *op.cit.*, p.14.

¹⁷⁸ For this see ‘Putting People First: Views and Comments from Albanian Politics and Citizens’ Priorities’, Findings from Focus Group Research in Albania, Dec. 2012, p.43-45. Available at <http://www.ndi.org/files/Albania-FG-122712-ENG.pdf>

¹⁷⁹ Gledis Gjipali, *op.cit.*, p.56.

¹⁸⁰ Ulrike Stern and Sarah Wohlfeld, *op.cit.*, p.11.

¹⁸¹ For this see the Albanian Institute for International Studies , Survey..., *op.cit.*, p.5.

¹⁸² For this see ‘Putting People First..’ *op.cit.*, p.24-26.

4.3.5 Trade Unions

Trade unions are as well established but still considered to be weak. Their weakness stems from the existence of a large informal economy and thus insufficient membership to the trade unions in the country.¹⁸³ An exception to this can be the Union of Mineworkers. “Rallies, site occupations, and hunger strikes were carried out with some results, even though state authorities mostly ignored the union’s requests and declined to play the role of mediator in disputes with private companies.”¹⁸⁴ While supporting a membership perspective for Albania, representatives of the confederation of Albanian trade unions criticize the government for the lack in implementation abilities and exclusion of the trade unions from the policy-making procedure. “The procedures required to be followed by the trade unions in order to ‘pressure’ the government are time consuming and the irresponsiveness from the government side makes this process last even longer.”¹⁸⁵

So, it can be stated that trade unions in Albania are weak and as such they are unable to exert their interests in the government’s policies. Government on the other hand seems not to be taking into account the criticisms raised by the trade unions.

4.3.6 Business Associations

Business associations as well have history as long as the NGOs and trade unions. There exist contradictions in regards to business association in the sense that on the one hand while they are considered to be underdeveloped on the other hand it is stated that they are in fact the most powerful element of the social force; in the sense that they are

¹⁸³ Gledis Gjipali, *ibid.*, p.56.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Interview with the representative of the Confederation of Albanian Trade Unions, Tirane, February 2013.

directly involved in the governmental activities.¹⁸⁶ Not necessarily as an organized social force but on an individual level the businessmen seem to be the most effective players. This thinking results from the existence of a very large number of business persons who are actively involved in Albanian politics and some even hold governmental positions. Regarding the EU integration process the business associations were as enthusiastic as all the other forces in Albania. Recent surveys have shown a decline in their support toward the integration cause. The business community is the leading social group in its ambivalent attitude towards the EU integration.¹⁸⁷ So, despite the fact of being an effective player and holding to a certain degree a ‘specific’ stance towards the EU integration process, specific in the sense of not fully supporting like the other actors, yet no alternative strategy has been offered by the business associations.

4.3.7 The intelligentsia

The early years of transition saw not only a massive emigration of Albanians in search of a better future abroad but what most strikes in this period is the phenomenon of ‘brain drain’, as a result of which Albanian society lost a considerable number of the knowledge elite of the country.¹⁸⁸ Albania had to face the transition to democracy with an immense absence among the very influential elements of the transition process. This has had its repercussion in the integration process as well. “In Albania there are no epistemic communities ...channels through which new ideas circulate from societies to governments as well as from country to country.”¹⁸⁹ In Gramsci’s terms, the organic intellectuals seem to be absent in Albania. Instead it may be stated that there are a few numbers of so-called think-tanks where project-driven intelligentsia work together,

¹⁸⁶ Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *op.cit.*, p.182.

¹⁸⁷ For this see (AIIS), *Survey, Rethinking European...*, *op.cit.*, p.7.

¹⁸⁸ Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *op.cit.*, p.184-186.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.184.

however on the basis of pre-determined frameworks. Therefore, the noted intelligentsia is functioning as technical staff rather than organic intellectuals. They produce and disseminate the ideas worked out by the government or larger research centers outside Albania.

4.3.8 The media

Media on the other hand has been a very active tool in that it has been monitoring the institutions in the country and reporting on the developments.¹⁹⁰ As such, it can be said to have performed a very powerful role not only throughout the democratization process, but also that of integration. In the survey done the media appeared as the best informed group on the integration process and scored pretty high in its favor, approximately 97%.¹⁹¹ However researches on the topic show that the media is becoming more and more dependent on power centers.¹⁹² “The conflict between the DP and SP not only affects the political system; it also has a negative influence on the independence of media and on civil society.”¹⁹³

There are risks of politicization of the media and these might have tough repercussions for the society as a whole as the former is to be the major source of information for the public at large. An instrumentalized media is to self-destruct its very essential purpose. “Problematic is also the triangular relations between politicians, the media and business leaders, whereas the media is interchangeably used for both political and business interests”¹⁹⁴ “Business representatives use the media to exercise

¹⁹⁰ Gledis Gjjipali, *op.cit.*, p.56.

¹⁹¹ For this see Studies (AIIS), *Survey ‘Albania and European ...’*, *op.cit.*, p.5.

¹⁹² FRIDE, Democracy Monitoring Report Albania, April 2010, available at http://www.fride.org/descarga/IP_Albania_ENG_ap10.pdf

¹⁹³ Ulrike Stern and Sarah Wohlfeld, *op.cit.*, p.11.

¹⁹⁴ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2012, *op.cit.*, p.8.

influence on politics. Representatives of the influential construction industry are often owners or shareholders in media outlets.”¹⁹⁵

The Albanian society at large is considered as the most pro-EU in the region. Whether this embrace stems from unbiased information about the integration process or from a strong commitment of achieving the EU living standards; it is secondary to the Union’s perception that has been enshrined in Albanians minds- the EU is the only way out for Albania. Even the crisis the Union is undergoing has not shaken this belief. “The Albanian people are unified in their desire for European integration. Despite a process of rapprochement that has been tedious and full of deprivation and the ongoing euro crisis, acceptance of the need for EU integration has remained steady among a majority of Albanians. 90 percent of the population endorsed EU accession in 2010.”¹⁹⁶

To sum up, an analysis of the stances of the social forces in Albania shows a very positive tendency towards the integration process; in other words the position the capital, labour and political and civil society in Albania seem to be converging to a common point: they all favor the EU integration perspective for Albania. In Gramscian terms a historic block seems to have been built and as a result of this a hegemonic pro-membership perspective seems to be at work. The political elites, as the most influential actors, may count for the hegemonic class. Despite some ‘smoothly’ growing dissatisfactions, those mentioned from the business circles, no alternative strategy other than that of the integration is offered so far from any of the social forces. Therefore, it may be stated that a hegemony situation exists on the Albanian side but it is to be a very fragile hegemony indeed. This is not to be a result of the weaknesses of the cooperation among the social forces; rather it stems from their own nature. It is a fact that since the social forces in Albania are weak and dependent on others, their hegemony indeed is to be a fragile one. Nevertheless, this very fragile hegemony is deemed to be not sufficient for the integration process to be realized as the latter is a mutual, two-sided relationship,

¹⁹⁵ Ulrike Stern and Sarah Wohlfeld, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.13.

and in such a condition an analysis of ‘the other side of the integration story’ is considered vital for the understanding of the development of the process. A picture of the EU’s perceptions and stances regarding Albania’s quest for EU membership is to be the heart matter of the next chapter.

4.4 Assessing Expectations and Evaluating Performance

In the attempt to evaluate the Albania’s so far journey towards the EU, the reforms undertaken and the degree they have been translated into net results for the country are of a great importance. Equally essential is the fact whether the country’s performance has been satisfactory enough to meet the expectations. For this, an analysis of Albania’s track from the early days of transition to the present is to be presented below. The way the EU has influenced and the role it has played throughout this process is also to be pointed out.

The overthrow of the PLA rule left Albania with the choice of jumping into the only train around: that of a transition process towards a liberal democracy and a free-market economy. But no doubt its legacy would accompany the country’s performance for a long time.¹⁹⁷ “Albania began its democratic transition weighted down with many structural obstacles that made its path to full democracy and a market economy challenging.”¹⁹⁸ Post-communist transformations in Albania can be described as not easy in that everything had to be built from ‘ground zero’. Additionally, a deteriorating element was the fact that as for Albania what was needed was a ‘double transition’¹⁹⁹ or

¹⁹⁷ Bertelsmann Stiftung , BTI 2012, *op.cit.*, p.3.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.22.

¹⁹⁹ Annete Freyberg-Inan, ‘Transition Economies’ in Richard Stubbs and Geoffrey R.D. Underhill (eds) *Political Economy and the Changing Global Order*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 420.

‘dual transformations’; both political transformations and economic ones. For Albania the transition process started in 1992. Once in power the Democratic Party (Partia Demokratike) initiated an economic take-off, a move from a totally state-owned economy to a free-market economy. With its stabilization program and the structural reforms undertaken during the first years of transition the country saw some changes.²⁰⁰ The liberalization of prices and foreign trade, the privatization of agricultural land and a macroeconomic stabilization program directed at the reduction of monetary growth, the budget deficit and inflation laid the foundation for the high average growth rate of 9.3% in the following three years (1993—96).²⁰¹ As far as the privatization process is concerned, Albania is said to have experienced the fastest among the ex-communist countries during their transition to democracy.²⁰² The government in power made a lot of efforts in building democratic institutions and providing the legal framework to ease the adoption of liberal policies. During these years Albania became member of a number of international organizations.²⁰³ This period is characterized by an economic boost in a stabilized macro economy and an affirmation of Albania in the international arena. Unfortunately this was not to last long. In 1997 Albania faced one the most difficult political and economic crisis. The collapse of the pyramid schemes resulted not only in a deep civic unrest but also it signed the overthrow of the progress achieved so far. “The consequence was a severe economic, social and political crisis, which was accompanied by, partly violent, mass protests and riots.”²⁰⁴ In the wake of the 1997

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.4.

²⁰¹ Anton Schautzer, ‘Albania: Country Profile and Recent Economic Developments’, *Focus*, Vol.1, No.5, p.108.

²⁰² Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *op.cit.*, p.39.

²⁰³ Albania became a member of the Council of Europe, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction.

²⁰⁴ Anton Schautzer, *op.cit.*, p.107.

crisis, Albania faced enormous challenges in overcoming the fragility of its institutions and restoring the state's capacity to exercise basic functions. Albania had again to start from 'ground zero'. The period 1998–2003 was crucial to Albania's efforts to return to normality, rebuild the capacity of state institutions, and re-launch economic growth on a more sustainable foundation.²⁰⁵ A military intervention by foreign troops under UN mandate (a coalition of the willing) helped to overcome the crisis and to gradually reestablish order. The foreign assistance and the remittances of the Albanian emigrants living abroad helped the country to overpass the crisis. From 1997 to 2005 the Socialists took the lead of the country. Structural reforms were also in the agenda of the socialists. They too focused on furthering the privatization process, improving infrastructure, energy sector etc. "After a setback in 1997 when the GDP decreased by 7% because of the financial crisis, Albania was soon on a growth track."²⁰⁶ In 1999 the Kosovo war proved to be a good test for Albania in that not only it became home to approximately 500.000 Albanian Kosovars, but also helped in preventing the conflict escalation in the region. Economic growth figures for the period from 1990 to 2004 come to make Albania be defined as 'the most successful transition economy'.²⁰⁷ During the same period the production's share on the GDP reflect oscillations on a sector basis.²⁰⁸ The industry and agriculture sectors' share trend seems to be a decreasing one, whereas that of construction and service sector follows an increasing inclination.²⁰⁹ As far as the labour market is concerned, a decrease in the labour force is viewed as a result of the massive emigration.²¹⁰ More importantly the informal or grey economy share is

²⁰⁵ 'Governance in Albania: A Way Forward for Competitiveness, Growth and European Integration', *A World Bank Issue Brief*, Report no.62518-A1, June 2011, p. 12

²⁰⁶ Anton Schautzer, *op.cit*, p.108-109.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.108.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.109.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.111-112.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.112.

estimated to be too large. “According to IMF estimates the informal sector accounts for 30% to 60% of the total Albanian economy, whereas INSTAT estimates it to account for one-third of official GDP (IMF, 2003).”²¹¹ Inflation score reached nearly zero in 1999, and in 2004 it was 2.9%. Foreign trade was mainly with the EU, especially Italy and Greece. In 2003 93% of Albania’s exports were to the EU, whereas its imports totaled 68 %. Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) share on the Albanian GDP has shown an increasing trend, reaching a score of 4.3% in 2004. 2005 elections, and later the 2009 ones which are considered as one of the most contested elections, brought to power the DP, and since then the democrats have been ruling the country. In January 2011 what started as a demonstration degenerated into physical confrontation between the police and protesters and four of the latter lost their lives whereas dozens were wounded.

Economic development and strengthening of the democratic institutions are two important measures for the country’s development and acceleration of its journey towards the EU. Privatization still continues to be the top-agenda of the economic reforms.²¹²

The government’s strategy to boost economic development includes a flat tax of 10 percent that was introduced in 2008 which is supposed to stimulate consumption and foreign direct investment (FDI). In addition, they are attempting to boost growth through large investments –above all in infrastructure– and by privatizing state-owned enterprises.²¹³

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.112-113.

²¹² In this regard, a large number of big enterprises in Albania have been privatized and this in turn has increased the FDI inflow to the country. See Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2012, *op.cit.*, p.17.

²¹³ Ulrike Stern and Sarah Wohlfeld, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

Still the FDI share on the country's GDP remains low.²¹⁴ The deficit on trade balance and weakness of market economy institutions and legal frameworks in Albania are considered to be the main impediments causing a lack of competitiveness of the Albanian products.²¹⁵ A variety of required reforms to be undertaken in this direction are also specified in the Commission's report listing the 12 key priorities for Albania in order to accelerate towards the candidacy status. A new report on the latest developments and the answer whether Albania is to be awarded with the candidacy status or that would be denied for the third time in a row is to be published in October 2013. In a nutshell, with the overthrow of the PLA rule Albania switched to liberal policies. It started by decreasing the state interference in economy and so moving from a totally state-owned economy to a free-market one. Liberalization of prices and foreign trade, export promotion and especially privatization and creation of the legal framework to attract the foreign capital were the main phases through which Albania's transformation underwent. Seen from a larger picture, Albania started becoming part of the new trend, - that of transnationalization of production and state. The main mechanism through which Albania's production is integrated into the transnational production structure is essentially trade and to a lesser extent, the FDI. The latter are considered to be a 'transmission belt' for the further consolidation of the neo-liberal hegemony.²¹⁶ Therefore Albania's liberalization and neo-liberal restructuring read against the background of globalization process can be considered as an instance of *trasformismo*. "Albania has since developed a broad and strategic relationship with the EU that indicates that the EU is the primary locus for Albania's external relations and its strategy for managing transition and integration into global economic and political

²¹⁴ Anton Schautzer, *op.cit*, p.124.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Stuart Shields, 'The 'Charge of the Right Brigade': Transnational Social Forces and the Neoliberal Configuration of Poland's Transition', *New Political Economy*, Vol.8, No.2, July 2003, p.235 referring to Robert W. Cox, *Production, Power and World Order*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1987, p.253.

structures.”²¹⁷ As a result, the EU integration can be viewed as a lens in furthering and not as an alternative to globalization.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has tried to give an insight of the Albania’s efforts towards its EU integration process while headed to the final destination – that of full membership. The historical background of the relations between the two, Albania and the EU, was given through a categorization of the periods of their relations. Throughout the Preparatory stage and that of the Pre-Negotiations, the relations between the two have shown to be good and steady whereas the signing of the SAA in 2006 can be stated to have intensified them and has opened space for the Union to set the ‘rules of the game’. As such, the EU through the promotion of integration and membership, is seen to be the main leading actor of Albania’s neo-liberal restructuring. In addition to this, an analysis of Albania’s social forces with regards to the integration process revealed the high acceptance the process enjoys among them, and out of which a hegemonic pro-membership perspective seem to have been borne. However, this is a very fragile hegemony because the positions of all forces, be it capital, labour, political or civil society converge in their consideration towards the EU integration as the ‘only-best’ option for Albania’s future, though, each of these social forces’ political and economic bases are extremely weak and thus may be influenced even by conjectural changes. Therefore, a historical block is said to be built and a hegemonic situation is to be at work with no alternative other than the integration process being an option. The EU integration has been shown to be a ‘lens’ of Albania’s integration into the wider transnational production structure and in turn a further consolidation means of the neo-liberal restructuring.

²¹⁷ Ailish Johnson, ‘Albania's Relations with the EU: On the road to Europe?’, *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans Online*, Vol.3, No.2, 2001, p.174-5.

CHAPTER 5

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S STANCE TOWARDS ALBANIA

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to shed light on the EU side of the 'Albania's EU integration story'. It focuses on the EU's strategy towards the region so that to explore the existence of any specific approach towards Albania. This study is to analyze not only the EU's so far involvement and contribution to Albania, but also the feedback procedure. The EU's perceptions regarding Albania's current situation and the so far achieved progress, its definition of possible obstacles lying ahead, suggestions, prescriptions and proposals for further steps towards the membership goal are to be considered a valuable contribution to the understanding of the EU's stance towards Albania's quest for the EU membership. Last but not least, a short review of the most recent discussions regarding multispeed or two-tier Europe is to be given with the aim of understanding whether or not such a debate is to have any affect in the relations between the EU and Albania. Provided that is the case, an estimation of the way the above mentioned debate is to effect the Albania-EU relations in general and the integration process specifically is aimed to be explored in this chapter.

5.2 The EU's Strategy towards the Western Balkans

We mentioned earlier that “the Cold War ensured for the integration to be confined to Western Europe”,²¹⁸ but once the curtain fell we see the Union showing an increasing interest in expanding its geographical area. As far as the Eastern Europe's integration is concerned, a sub-regionalization process in terms of the EU's approach to the region can be said to have been put in place. Therefore, a structure composed of the East Central Europe including Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic; the South East Europe including Romania and Bulgaria, and the Western Balkans including Albania, Serbia, Macedonia, Croatia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina came into being. This sub-regionalization has shown to be the so far pattern of EU enlargement as well. Scholars argue that the reasons for the eastern enlargement may vary from expectations from the EU to take the lead in the region, to future possible benefits resulting from the expansion of internal and external markets, and even to the Union's ability to export stability beyond its borders.²¹⁹ Despite its underlying purposes, the enlargement process has continued through years, even though in an oscillated trajectory²²⁰, and has provided for the EU to reach a number of 28 members so far. Croatia is the newest member of the EU, being so the very first Western Balkan country succeeding in its road to the EU membership.²²¹ The way and degree this Croatia's accession to the EU is to influence the other Western Balkans countries performance in their way towards EU integration remains to be seen.

We have mentioned in chapter three how the EU employed varying enlargement strategies, the latter being dependent upon the actor involved in the enlargement

²¹⁸ Desmond Dinan, ‘Europe Recast...’, *op.cit.*, p.5.

²¹⁹ Mustafa Türkeş and Goksu Gökgöz, *op.cit.*, p.665-667.

²²⁰ *Oscillated trajectory* in the sense of being differentiated by the number of members acceding, their characteristics and the timeframe it took for each to become full members.

²²¹ Croatia accessed the EU on July 1st 2013, ‘Croatia celebrates on joining EU’, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-23118035>, accessed on July 1st 2013.

process. As far as the Western Balkans are concerned, we pointed out how a new formula was derived by the Union; a strategy with a regional dimension – the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP). This is believed to lead to a more challenging and a longer accession process for all the Western Balkans countries. A variety of arguments have come to the fore as far as the Union’s enlargement strategy towards the Western Balkans is concerned. Some underline the inconsistency aspect of it, while others stress the uncertainty of such a strategy. “Certainly the EU strategy for engagement with the Balkans, with its varied forms of full membership, candidacy for membership, and potential membership, is a project with nebulous end-goals.”²²² Turkes and Goksu define the EU’s enlargement strategy towards the Western Balkans as one of “neither total exclusion nor rapid integration”²²³, therefore pointing to the integration’s ‘open-ended’ character peculiarity. Elbasani identifies the overloaded and not easily reconcilable double agenda of the SAP and points to the ambiguity it poses regarding the final membership status.²²⁴

The so far applied strategy stands still. The SAP together with its two components, the SAA and CARDS, remain to be the only means to assess the progress achieved in the fulfilling of the Copenhagen criteria. Alongside, the screening mechanisms are to define the pace of reforms which in turn determines the ability and readiness in joining the EU. Even though the EU’s approach is to be a regional one rather than one tailored to each specific country of the region, the accession process seems to be based on individual work of each country; in other words it is offered as a ‘merit based’ one. So far, from the Western Balkans countries, only Croatia seems to have succeeded and was ‘awarded’ on July 2013 with membership. The others, including Albania, are still on the way.

²²² Ailish M. Johnson, *op.cit.*, p.192.

²²³ Mustafa Turkes and Goksu Goksu, *op.cit.*, p.659.

²²⁴ Arolda Elbasani, “The SAP in the Balkans..”, *op.cit.*, p.17-18.

5.2.1 The European Union considering Albania

It was previously shown how establishing ties with foreign countries and especially the EU members was one of the first things Albania did right after the collapse of the PLA rule. A picture of the Albania-EU relations in time reveals the latter to be a continuity, accompanied by an increasingly intensification of the relations through time. But as far as the EU's approach towards Albania is concerned, it is advantageous to understand the Albania's position in the EU integration process as part of the overall strategies EU follows for the whole Western Balkans region, because in reality there hasn't been any specific strategy on behalf of Albania.

Integration is happening on an incremental basis, in the absence of firm commitments. The very nature of the institutional structure of the EU itself, with *Directorates-Generals* (DGs) separated by function and sometimes only weakly coordinated, has frustrated the emergence of a coherent, integrated strategy for EU relations with Albania and indeed the Balkans as a whole.²²⁵

When asked whether the EU had a single policy towards Albania, the EU Ambassador in Tirana replied:

Our member states might have different opinions, perceptions based on their individual history, their proximity or not to Albania. But one thing is for sure – there is a unity of intent as far as the basics are concerned. On Albania's EU integration we feel the same and our position is clear. There is equal commitment, strong participation and openness by all.²²⁶

²²⁵ Ailish M. Johnson, *op.cit.*, p.191.

²²⁶ EU Ambassador Ettore Sequi, Interview with Janusz Bugajski, on "Bugajski Hour", Albanian Screen, April 26th 2012, Tirane, Albania.

Nevertheless, the existence of a unity of intent cannot count for a unified EU strategy towards Albania. Therefore, we can argue that no ‘Albania specific’ strategy seem to be at work as far as the EU’s approach towards the country is concerned.

5.2.2 The European Union’s Contribution to Albania

The EU’s assistance to the country has varied in many areas. Indeed, the aid and assistance programmes the EU has offered to Albania have been very generous. Such was the case in 1991, with the humanitarian aid coded “Operation Pelikan”, aid aiming the prevention of a further flow of emigrants outside the country. Another was “Operation Alba” – a ‘coalition of the willing’, which included assistance in the area of security and defense, especially for the 1997 crisis.²²⁷ “After the 1997 pyramid scheme collapse, bilateral Albania–EU ties intensified through aid provision and civil society development projects aimed at re-establishing control over public utilities and policing.”²²⁸ In 1999 when Albania was to come face to face with the Kosovo crisis, the EU made its presence felt through Albanian Force for Humanitarian Assistance (AFOR) which helped in sheltering and feeding the Kosovar refugees.

Aid contributing to the strengthening of the domestic institutions so that to support investment such as PHARE and ECHO lasted from 1991 to 2000; that was followed by the aid in terms of direct investment from European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and European Investment Bank.²²⁹ Additional assistance is given in the judicial area and education (TEMPUS) as well. Initiatives in combating violence against children and women (DAPHNE), those in combating trafficking of human beings (IRENE), assistance in retraining police forces (MAPE) and the numerous Twinning programmes, which involved technical advice and

²²⁷ Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *op.cit.*, p.210.

²²⁸ Ailish M. Johnson, *op.cit.*, p.175.

²²⁹ Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *op.cit.*, p.210-211.

assistance has also been a great contribution.²³⁰ “The EU has been involved in Albanian reconstruction more than any other bilateral or multilateral partner, as measured by the broad scope of policy areas in which the EU and its aid and financial structures cooperate with Albanian authorities.”²³¹ Mostly as it can be noted, the EU’s involvement is not only peculiar to crisis periods. And as such, the argument the Union’s security issues being a priority in its involvement in the region -“the EU seems to give more priority to security issues and stability rather than democratic ones”²³² - comes to be part of a truth but not the one and only explanation. Taking into consideration the aid programmes as a whole, we can clearly see how those aiming to contribute to the strengthening of domestic institutions so that the latter becomes able to attract and facilitate foreign investments in Albania, do not fall under the security aim of the Union. This has more to do with what is numbered as the second aim of the Eastern enlargement: that of reaping possible profits from the enlargement of internal and external markets. As Turkes points out, “the EU has been restructuring the region in line with neo-liberalism so that to prepare it for the pre incorporation stage.”²³³ Therefore, we can state that “Europeanization is sufficiently deeply embedded to act as a filter for globalization.”²³⁴

Despite all the aid and assistance given so far Albania still can be considered to be far from a fully-fledged liberal democracy as well as a well-functioning market economy. Blaming the domestic actors, a so widely used argument, is believed to be one-sided and therefore this way of thinking paves the way to consider the other side as well.

Though the domestic actors are more or less in agreement to cooperate with the EU, they are still blamed for not being able to meet the requirements. But it should be

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.211-212.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² Elda Nasho, *op.cit.*, p.1.

²³³ Mustafa Turkes and Goksu Gokgoz, *op.cit.*, p. 669.

²³⁴ Helen Wallace, *op.cit.*, p.381.

stressed that they are not given the sufficient backing to meet the burden of the integration process. In other words, the effectiveness of the so far applied prescription can be said to have proved to be not very efficient for the Albanian case as “the incentive structure provided by the EU has not been sufficiently adjusted to the needs of a less developed transition country.”²³⁵ Therefore, miscalculations or not taking into consideration the peculiarities of the country while building the incentive structure for it, has proved as in the case of Albania, not to be fatal but to show a declining effectiveness and as such to have a negative contribution to the overall integration process.

5.2.3 The European Union’s Feedback

In a country where the idea that the “EU is the only best option” and the “EU knows best” is widely accepted, the EU’s perceptions regarding Albania’s current situation and the so far achieved progress, its definition of possible obstacles lying ahead, suggestions, prescriptions and proposals for further steps towards the membership goal are to be considered a valuable contribution alongside the various aid and assistance programmes. The EU delegation in Tirana through its active work makes its presence felt every way. Apart from the press conferences of the EU Ambassador in Albania Mr. Sequi and the reports the EU Embassy staff in the country prepares and publishes, Country Progress Reports prepared annually by the Commission with the request of the Council count for the most important EU’s feedback in regards to Albania. They give an overview of the country’s achieved progress measured on the basis of decisions taken, legislation adopted and the degree the latter is implemented. After briefly describing the relations between Albania and the EU, the Progress Report analyses the situation in Albania in terms of political and economic criteria and its capacity to take on the obligations of membership. What is peculiar to Albania is that the EU’s feedback in general and these reports in particular have proved to be a ‘must’ or the centerpiece of the country’s to-be followed future

²³⁵ Judith Hoffmann, *op,cit.*, p.55.

development path. “Messages in the form of the EU reports, evaluations and critiques have become the signposts of change to the extent that they are the epicenter around which achievements and future challenges are debated and decided upon.”²³⁶ This in turn gives space to political actors to ‘use and abuse’ the integration card in their favor in case needed to justify their actions.

The integration approach applied to the region including Albania has been prone to criticisms revealing its limitations. While some question whether the EU is not sufficiently demanding Albania to comply with democratic standards²³⁷ others emphasize the absence of the coercion leverage from the EU against non-compliance with EU conditions from Albania.²³⁸ Others have gone even farther pointing how “the application of EU conditions allows plenty of space for domestic actors to pay lip service to the EU conditions and neutralize EU influence when it crosses hard interests of maintaining power.”²³⁹ These not only point to the criticisms regarding the effectiveness of the integration approach applied to the region, but also pave the way for questioning the EU’s stance towards the region and the degree its commitments straightforward and real.

An analysis of the reports shows in fact a contradictory stance of the EU in the sense that while at some point it praises Albania for the achieved results, at the same time it underlines the significant gaps and the great amount of work remaining to be done.²⁴⁰ Said differently, the question that comes to mind is whether the reason for the

²³⁶ Arolda Elbasani, ‘Albania in Transition..’, *op.cit.*, p.24.

²³⁷ Elda Nasho, *op.cit.*, p.11.

²³⁸ Judith Hoffmann, *op.cit.*, p.58.

²³⁹ Arolda Elbasani, ‘EU Administrative Conditionality and Domestic Downloading: The Limits of Europeanization in Challenging Contexts’, *KFG Working Paper*, No. 2, July 2009, p.19.

²⁴⁰ See Elda Nasho, *op.cit.*, p.14; see also European Commission, Albania 2012 Progress Report, Brussels, 10/10/2012 http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2012/package/al_rapport_2012_en.pdf

slow pace of reforms in Albania is that there exists just a fictive adoption on paper or a big lack in implementation. If the first argument is to be case, then the reports prove to be contradictory in their talking about some progress achieved so far. On the other hand, the argument underlining the lack in implementation points to the Albania's incapability of implementing reforms; another way of talking about an one-sided attribution of weaknesses.

In a nutshell, the EU has shown to be considering the Western Balkans as a whole, and Albania as a part of it. The formula for the Union's involvement remains the SAP, a regional approach indeed. Therefore, it may be said that it is not possible to talk about a specific strategy applied tailored just to Albania. Nevertheless, the Union's contribution in aid and assistance has been enormous for Albania. They have proved helpful for the so much needed transformations of the country. Indeed, the EU's position in contributing to the region's neo-liberal restructuring remains firm. Nevertheless, the feedback procedure it has been following so far has shown to be contradictory in nature. This may indicate the lack of hegemony as far as the EU's stance towards Albania is concerned.

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http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2011/package/al_rapport_2011_en.pdf

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5.3 Multi-speed Europe and the EU Enlargement

The 2008 financial crisis and the following Eurozone crisis in 2010 have opened space for the discussion of a multi-speed Europe.²⁴¹ “The specter of a two-tiered Europe has come at the stage, as the discrepancies between the strong and the weak economies struggling to co-exist on the continent have now become more visible.”²⁴² The newly euro rescue package emerged, the Fiscal Compact - hailed by Merkel as the ‘milestone in the history of the EU’ - has put forward once more the question of whether the crisis has created a two-tier EU with the insiders, the 17 Eurozone countries, driving decision-making, while the 10 euro "outs" are not even in the room?²⁴³

It is one of the consequences of the Eurozone crisis that the call has arisen for more European integration, including economic governance and even fiscal union. In the first instance, deeper integration would affect economic and monetary union members, thus creating a two-speed Europe in terms of integration.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ FEEDBlog, Economic Integration, ‘A how many speeds Europe?’, available at <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/blog/1164671-how-many-speeds-europe>. See also Joachim and Weissenbacher, Rudy, ‘Western Balkans: Peripheral Integration without Stability?’, in Antevski, Miroslav and Mitrovic, Dragana (eds) *Western Balkans: From Stabilization to Integration*, The Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade 2012, p.31-52.

²⁴² Irene Chapple, ‘Are we heading toward a two tier Europe?’ available at <http://business.blogs.cnn.com/2011/11/10/are-we-heading-toward-a-two-tier-europe/> accessed on 25 November 2012.

²⁴³ Kirsty Walker, ‘Tories go on attack over 'two-tier Europe treaty': New pressure for referendum as Britain is sidelined in euro deal’, 3 March 2012 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2109264/EU-treaty-Angela-Merkel-hails-fiscal-deal-great-leap-hours-debt-rules-broken.html#ixzz1ycmgQwPd> accessed on 5 March 2012.

²⁴⁴ Bela Galgoczi, ‘A Europe of Multi-Speed in Downward Spiral’, *SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe*, January 2012, p.27.

In other words, the crisis and the degree it will be escalating in time, is believed to determine the very future of the EU. Some skeptics believe this to be the doom to failure for the Union, while others consider this crisis to be another one from those which the Union has experienced so far and has been able to surpass. The decision of which is to be the case for Europe this time remains to be seen in the future.

With the aim of finding the underlying reason of such a crisis scholars have tended to categorize the principal weaknesses and deficiencies of the European Union as it currently operates. Piris' categorization points to the difficulties of decision-making in the Council; alongside this, the Commission as well as the European Parliament with their fluctuating power responsibilities are seen to be part of the institutional malaise. In that, he offers four different options to allow tackling of the EU's problems: (1) a substantial treaty revision, (2) a further developed cooperation within the borders of the Lisbon treaty, (3) a politically built two-speed Europe and lastly (4) a legally built two-speed Europe.²⁴⁵ Galgozci on the other hand links the crisis to other sources.

We can see that there is a manifest debt financing problem on the surface, but this is more due to a lack of confidence in a determined European crisis management policy. The Eurozone crisis is much more due to the economic imbalances that have accumulated over a decade.²⁴⁶

Whatever the case, the discussion goes whether that the multi-speed integration on fiscal questions will further and even definitively undermines the prospects for EU unity on foreign policy. In other words, how is all this going to affect the future enlargements? What will be the case for the Western Balkans? How about Albania?

²⁴⁵ Paul P. Craig, 'Two-Speed, Multi-Speed and Europe's Future: A Review of Jean-Claude Piris on the Future of Europe', *Legal Research Paper Series*, Paper No.4, January 2013, p.802.

²⁴⁶ Bela Galgozci, *op.cit.*, p.32.

For sure, the debate regarding the future of EU is to redirect most of the attention into finding a way in resolving the crisis; this meaning for the other issues including integration to be left aside from the Union's priority agenda, at least for the time being. As before stated, the EU's involvement in the region coincides with its aim of possible increasing future economic benefits, so in a way it can count for a guarantee of the continuation of this involvement as it is first in the Union's interests. Placing future Albania-EU relations in this context may lead to a similar picture. No big difference can be said to come to the fore. The relations between the two can be expected to be steady. What might resurface is the argument that the Union's strategy is to continue not to be individually tailored to each country which in turn is to highlight the degree of the effectiveness in the pace of reforms and all this may result in a prolonged integration process.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to analyze the EU's stance towards Albania's EU integration and membership quest. It has shown an absence of a specific strategy regarding Albania, but rather the latter has been part of a regional strategy, that peculiar to the Western Balkans. In a context of continuously intensifying relations between the two, the EU is shown to be committed to the region's transformation and future integration. In these regards, the contributions of the EU to the region in general and to Albania in particular are immense and so much appreciated. Yet, this is seen to be insufficient for Albania's rapidly progressing integration process. Nevertheless, through its feedback structure the Union has opened space for confusion regarding its stance towards Albania. Indeed, the reports released on regards of Albania's so far achieved progress indicate the EU's stance to be contradictory in nature, while on the one hand it praises for the developments on the other it highlights the still existing significant gaps. This situation may be said to have opened space for considering the EU's stance toward Albania's quest for the EU membership as one of a 'lack' of hegemony. The multi-speed Europe debate regarding the future of the EU seems to highlight a furtherance of

this situation. All this is believed to lead to a postponed integration process for the Western Balkans as a whole and Albania in particular.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The Albania's EU integration process may be situated within the structural dynamics of globalization and neo-liberal restructuring where the former is shown to be a consolidation means of the country's neo-liberal restructuring and to account for a 'filter' of Albania's integration into the wider transnational production structure. An assessment of the integration theories evidenced their shortcomings and proved them to be insufficient for the analyzing of Albania's ongoing EU integration process. As such this study made no use of the integration theories throughout its analysis. Nevertheless, the neo-Gramscian perspectives and their core premises proved to be a more effective tool in grasping the dynamics of such an undertaking. Therefore, this research relied on neo-Gramscian perspectives as an alternative explanatory tool and which indeed provided for the theoretical framework of this thesis. The adoption of the neo-Gramscian perspectives enabled the analysis not only to scrutinize the socio-economic content and the power relations underpinning Albania's integration process, but also to account for possible alternative class strategies different from the hegemonic project.

An analysis of the historical evolution of the EU enlargement evidenced for a continuity in the Union's integration strategy. Nevertheless, it is revealed to be one following an oscillatory trajectory. Each enlargement phase is characterized not only by the varying number of acceding countries and their distinctive peculiarities but what is more, continuously expanding membership requirements are seen to be imposed on each applicant state. In other words, the different conditions and criteria utilized for each enlargement phase point to a 'shifting conditionality' as the mark of the EU's enlargement strategy. Whereas for the underlying reason of this 'shifting conditionality' this study has shown it to lie with the very nature of the integration process itself. Being

hegemonic means being continuously prone to change. Thus, a new set of criteria or an addition to the already existing ones may be the next step of the Union's enlargement strategy.

After the overthrow of the communist party rule, Albania opened itself to the West and established ties with the USA and the European countries. Since the very start of its transition process the EU has proved to be a very generous provider of the so much needed aid and assistance. Indeed, it can be stated that, as for the Albanian case, the two processes, that of transition and that of integration, have been feeding each other. A literature review on the topic has shown how previous studies have tended to analyse Albania's EU integration process by focusing just on either side of the relationship. Whereas this study, by considering integration a two-sided mutual relationship stressed the importance of overcoming such one-sided arguments. Therefore, an analysis of both sides' perceptions, stances and endeavors in regards to the integration process proved to offer a clearer insight of Albania's journey to the EU.

For Albania the EU membership is the 'return to Europe' and as such has been a top-priority issue on the country's agenda. In this regard, through its analysis of the Albanian social forces considering the EU integration, this study argues that their stance has resulted in a hegemonic pro-membership perspective. Nevertheless, it can be stated that this is the case of a very fragile hegemony. Though, the fragility is not to derive from the weakness of the cooperation among the social forces, but rather from that of their own economic and political basis. The built of the hegemonic block and the arousal of hegemony does not necessarily imply the lack of alternatives, but as for the Albanian case it can be said that no rival strategy other than the pro-membership project is to be offered. The 'smooth' dissatisfactions and criticisms of the business associations have proven to be as insufficient in transforming themselves into an alternative strategy.

An analysis of the EU's stance toward Albania's quest for the EU membership is viewed to be very important for the understanding of the integration process. As far as Albania's case is concerned this study has revealed the absence of a Union's strategy specific to Albania. Rather, the Albania's case is considered within the overall strategy

applied to the Western Balkans. 'Blaming' the domestic actors for whatever failure is seen to be a continuously and widely accepted argument. Whereas, this study puts forward the argument that as integration is a mutual, two-sided relationship, the backing and helping of the domestic actors in meeting the burden of the integration process is equally important. Moreover, the EU is presented to have a contradictory stance regarding Albania, this especially noticed in its feedback structure. These discussions pave the way for considering the EU's stance as one of 'lacking hegemony' as far as Albania's quest for the EU membership is concerned. This in turn, reveals a 'delaying' character of the integration strategy which results in a prolonged integration process. The discussions on multi-speed Europe within the Union itself are also shown to highlight the furtherance of this situation.

This research has analyzed Albania's bid for the EU membership and has argued that its ongoing integration process is a result of an open-ended struggle among the social forces within the country and that of the EU. The process indeed is one not tailored to Albania, but rather one considered on a regional framework.

The process within the EU side is shown to be not determinative enough as to integrate Albania as a full member yet. This has resulted indeed in a prolonged integration process. On the other hand, within the Albania side a hegemonic pro-membership perspective has arisen, even though it can be stated to be a very fragile hegemony. What is more, the discussions about the multi-speed Europe have shown not to have any effect on the already arisen hegemony on the Albania side. As such, it can be said that within Albania the EU integration can be considered to have been translated into an instance of passive revolution.

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