



**NAVAL  
POSTGRADUATE  
SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**DEMOCRATIZATION IN ALBANIA: THE OSCE, NATO  
AND THE EUROPEAN UNION**

by

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June 2010

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<b>REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.				
<b>1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)</b>		<b>2. REPORT DATE</b> June 2010	<b>3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED</b> Master's Thesis	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> Democratization in Albania: The OSCE, NATO and the European Union			<b>5. FUNDING NUMBERS</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Adriatik Mema			<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			<b>10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> N/A			<b>11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.	
<b>12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited			<b>12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE</b>	
<b>13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)</b>  The collapse of the communist regime in 1990 and the establishment of political pluralism marked the beginning of a new era for Albania, one of transition from communism to democracy. In addition to undertaking domestic political and economic reforms, Albania began to establish political and economic relations with European and Euro-Atlantic organizations as a means of making the transition to democracy irreversible. Membership in these organizations, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the European Union (EU), was a long-term objective of Albania's new political leadership. This thesis examines their important roles in helping the country to democratize, carry out democratic reforms, and meet membership criteria. It also analyzes their impact in shaping the country's domestic political development, and their role in the promotion of stability, security and prosperity. It concludes that the involvement of these organizations has enhanced not only the quality of the reforms, but also the sustainability of democratic achievements in Albania. Finally, the thesis considers the prospects for Albania's future democratic development, the OSCE's probable future role in the country, challenges beyond NATO membership, and above all, further reforms to be accomplished in light of prospective EU membership.				
<b>14. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Democratization, international organizations, domestic politics, conditionality, membership criteria, accession.			<b>15. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 123	
			<b>16. PRICE CODE</b>	
<b>17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT</b> Unclassified	<b>18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE</b> Unclassified	<b>19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT</b> Unclassified	<b>20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b> UU	

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**DEMOCRATIZATION IN ALBANIA: THE OSCE, NATO AND THE  
EUROPEAN UNION**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(EUROPE AND EURASIA)**

from the

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## **ABSTRACT**

The collapse of the communist regime in 1990 and the establishment of political pluralism marked the beginning of a new era for Albania, one of transition from communism to democracy. In addition to undertaking domestic political and economic reforms, Albania began to establish political and economic relations with European and Euro-Atlantic organizations as a means of making the transition to democracy irreversible. Membership in these organizations, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the European Union (EU), was a long-term objective of Albania's new political leadership.

This thesis examines their important roles in helping the country to democratize, carry out democratic reforms, and meet membership criteria. It also analyzes their impact in shaping the country's domestic political development, and their role in the promotion of stability, security and prosperity. It concludes that the involvement of these organizations has enhanced not only the quality of the reforms, but also the sustainability of democratic achievements in Albania.

Finally, the thesis considers the prospects for Albania's future democratic development, the OSCE's probable future role in the country, challenges beyond NATO membership, and above all, further reforms to be accomplished in light of prospective EU membership.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AAF	Albanian Armed Forces
CARDS	Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization
CEC	Central Election Commission
CEE	Central and Eastern European
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CSCE	Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe
CTF	Consultative Task Force
DP	Democratic Party
EC	European Communities
ECAAA	Energy Community Treaty and the European Common Aviation Area Agreement
EU	European Union
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
HLSG	High Level Steering Group
IFES	International Foundation for Election Systems
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPP	Individual Partnership Program
MAP	Membership Action Plan
MPF	Multi-national Protection Force
NAC	North Atlantic Council
NACC	North Atlantic Cooperation Council
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDI	National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

NGO	Non-Government Organization
NSDI	National Strategy for Development and Integration
OCC	Operational Capabilities Concept
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PARP	Planning and Review Process
PHARE	Poland and Hungary Assistance for Reconstructing their Economies
PPF	Partnership for Peace
PLA	Party of Labor of Albania
SAA	Stabilization and Association Agreement
SAP	Stabilization and Association Process
TCA	Trade and Cooperation Agreement
UN	United Nations

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to express my greatest appreciation to Professor David S. Yost and Professor Donald Abenheim as my thesis co-advisers.

I am deeply grateful to Professor Yost for his encouragement and guidance during my research, his invaluable advice and tireless support.

I would like to thank Professor Donald Abenheim for his insight and interesting comments in preparing this thesis.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to the American Embassy in Albania, which offered me the International Military Education and Training (IMET) Program.

This work is dedicated to my wife, Violeta, and two daughters, Albora and Gleda.

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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

The collapse of the communist regime in 1990 and the establishment of political pluralism marked the beginning of a new era for Albania. These events started a democratization agenda involving state rebuilding processes aimed at restoring not only the boundaries between politics and economics, but also the boundaries separating public from private, the state from civil society, and the regime from the state.

The end of 1990 also marks the beginning of a transition period from communism to democracy. In addition to domestic, political and economic reforms, Albania started to establish political and economic relations with Western countries and international institutions and organizations. The last country in Eastern Europe to put an end to its communist regime, and with no previous democratic experience, Albania sought cooperation with international organizations as a means of making the transition to democracy and a market economy irreversible. Furthermore, membership in international organizations, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the European Union (EU), was a long-term objective of Albania's new political leadership.

This thesis addresses the important roles of the OSCE, NATO and the EU in the transition of Albania by helping the country to democratize, carry out the necessary democratic reforms, and meet membership criteria. The major research question is how and to what extent these international organizations, the OSCE, NATO and the EU, have affected the democratization process in Albania. The thesis analyzes the influence of these international organizations on the process of democratization in Albania, their impact in shaping the country's domestic political development, and their role in the promotion of stability, security and prosperity.

## **B. IMPORTANCE**

Many experts have written about democratic progress in Albania, but little assessment has been given to the impact and leverage of international organizations on

the development of democracy in Albania. The legacy of the communist regime made it difficult for Albania to cope with the demands of international organizations. Almost twenty years after the end of the communist regime in 1990, Albania has entered a new phase of political consolidation and democratic development. The country has made considerable progress towards strengthening democratic institutions. Albania became a member of the OSCE in 1992 and a member of NATO in 2009. Achieving membership in NATO was the most important foreign-policy event in post-communist Albania, and the most significant democratic milestone for the country.

It appears that international organizations such as the OSCE, NATO and the EU have helped accelerate the democratization of the country. The process of negotiations with the European Union, which officially started on 31 January 2003, was finalized with the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement between the Republic of Albania and the European Communities on 12 June 2006. In April 2009, Albania applied for “candidate status” with the European Union.

The goal of this thesis is to assess the impact of the OSCE, NATO and the EU on Albania’s democratization process. It investigates the hypothesis that the involvement of these organizations has helped, not only in the quality of reforms, but also in the stability and sustainability of democratic achievements in Albania. The thesis does not disregard, however, the contributions of domestic actors in the democratic development of the country. The thesis also considers the prospects for future democratic development, the OSCE’s future role in Albania, challenges beyond NATO membership, and most importantly, further reforms to be accomplished in light of the prospective EU membership.

### **C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESIS**

The OSCE, NATO and EU membership processes are evaluated with a view to determining to what extent they have been successful instruments in the promotion of democracy in post-communist Albania. The OSCE was the first international organization that Albania joined in 1992, shortly after the collapse of the communist regime. Since then, cooperation with the OSCE and other international organizations,



particularly NATO (through the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, Partnership for Peace and Membership Action Plan), and later the EU, provided the blueprints for reforms and prepared the country for membership.

The effects of the international assistance in the democratization process appear to have been significant because Albania is one of the countries that, according to Dessie Zagorcheva, lacked “the technical expertise to design the democratic institutions they desire.”<sup>1</sup> In contrast with the OSCE, NATO and the EU use conditionality as a promising strategy in promoting democracy and establishing democratic institutions in Albania and other countries. Like other East European countries, Albania chose first to focus “on satisfying NATO’s less rigorous membership criteria”<sup>2</sup> as a means of paving the way towards EU membership.

As noted previously, in April 2009, Albania became a member of NATO and applied for “candidate status” with the European Union. The parliamentary elections held shortly thereafter were considered a good chance for Albania to leave the past behind and to confirm the progress and strengthening of its democracy. With this political background, the thesis, in addition to analyzing the extent to which the OSCE, NATO and the EU affected the democratization process in Albania, raises three important issues: first, the quality and standard of democratic reforms in the country;<sup>3</sup> second, challenges beyond NATO membership; and third, prospects for EU membership.

As Emilian Kavalski has observed, “Alliance socialisation,” including democratization, “does not end with membership, but carries on inside the organisation as well.”<sup>4</sup> While membership in the Alliance is the conclusion of a long relationship, integration into the Alliance is a much longer process, which in addition to the development of national capabilities in the political, economic, military, financial, legal

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<sup>1</sup> Dessie Zagorcheva, “Correspondence: NATO and Democracy,” *International Security* 26, no. 3, (2002): 221–235.

<sup>2</sup> Zoltan Barany, “NATO’s Peaceful Advance,” *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 1(2002): 63.

<sup>3</sup> In other words, was NATO membership made possible because of the democratic reforms carried out, or was NATO membership an unmerited “gift” to the Albanian people and its political class?

<sup>4</sup> Emilian Kavalski, *Extending the European Security Community Constructing Peace in the Balkans* (Touris Academic Studies, London, New York, 2008), 163.

and information security areas, requires the continuation of democratic reforms and the strengthening of democratic institutions. Only the completion of these reforms and the strengthening of democratic institutions will bring the date of EU membership closer for Albania. Democratization is a continuous process, and as such, it never ends.

#### **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Literature on the promotion of democracy has grown considerably during recent years, and it increasingly recognizes the importance of the changed international environment, since 1990, in providing new opportunities for the promotion of democracy. Among the themes highlighted in the recent literature are the priorities of the promotion of democracy among foreign policy concerns, the growing acceptance of the idea of international involvement in the internal affairs of states, the proliferation of instruments for this purpose, and the predominant focus on outcomes as well as processes.

The recent literature illustrates an increasing trend in examining the role of international organizations as promoters of democracy and stability. While not all international organizations regard the promotion of democracy as part of their mission, membership in organizations composed of democratic countries positively affects democracy's promotion. With regard to democratization and other goals, conditionality "is the core strategy of international organizations to induce non-member states to comply with their fundamental rules of statehood."<sup>5</sup>

The role of the organizations under consideration in this thesis has borne significant importance for Albania, with a legacy of almost 45 years of complete isolation and the harshest communist regime in Europe. International actors played an important role in the regime change in late 1990.

The new political situation in Europe, especially with the enlargement of NATO and the EU, has raised the issue of the relevance of the OSCE to the new security reality in Europe. Since its inception, the OSCE has always been instrumental in "the

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<sup>5</sup> Frank Schimmelfennig, Stefan Engert, Heiko Knobel, "*The Conditions of Conditionality*," <http://www.essex.ac.uk/ECPR/events/jointsessions/paperarchive/turin/ws4/Schimmelfennig.pdf> (accessed 01 August 2009).

transformation of Europe from the Cold War to the post-Cold War era.”<sup>6</sup> The OSCE has reflected the changing needs of participating states as well as the ongoing transformation of European and international affairs.

Another significant body of literature has recently focused on the role of the OSCE in security and democracy promotion. Two schools of thought have developed. One school, while confirming the contribution of the OSCE “to the transformation of Europe from the Cold War to the post-Cold War era,”<sup>7</sup> argues that the radically changed contemporary European security landscape has affected the organization to such an extent that it may be called an organization “in crisis and decline.”<sup>8</sup> With the new international security landscape, there are other international institutions—the EU, the Council of Europe, and NATO—which address the same issues but from different angles or perspectives, and “have all more or less successfully adapted to the new international political and security landscape.”<sup>9</sup> At the same time, with the successful enlargement of the EU and NATO, “there is a tendency at the political level to devote less attention to the OSCE which has increasingly disappeared from public view. In many countries, the OSCE is rarely placed high on political agendas in Capitals.”<sup>10</sup>

A second school of thought, while admitting the current critical situation of the OSCE, holds that “the OSCE still has the potential and has a relevant role to play in a Europe facing new security challenges. In recent years, the OSCE has encountered serious problems and has entered into a critical situation that requires high-level attention by the participating States.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, “the OSCE institutions should be restructured to reflect today’s challenges from the emerging new security architecture of Europe.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Dunay, “The OSCE in Crisis,” *Chaillot Paper* no. 88 (2006): 89.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>10</sup> “The Future of the OSCE” A Joint Project of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Swiss Institute for World Affairs, Washington, 5–6 June 2005, [http://www.osce.org/documents/pa/2005/06/15378\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/pa/2005/06/15378_en.pdf) 6 (accessed 18 June 2009).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Berry, “The future of the OSCE,” British American Security Council, 2003/1, 11, <http://www.basicint.org/pubs/futureosce-fin.pdf> (accessed 19 June 2009).

However, both schools of thought maintain that the organization is in need of reform and that the OSCE needs, at the moment, “a new spirit of Helsinki.”<sup>13</sup>

The post-Cold War enlargements of NATO have raised the debate of whether the Alliance contributed to democratization in Europe. Since the end of the Cold War, NATO membership has been a consistent political objective for East European countries, “a prospect that has given NATO tremendous leverage over these states’ domestic and foreign policies.”<sup>14</sup> As with the OSCE, two schools of thought have developed. One school of thought, while stating that “NATO membership has not and will not advance democratization in Europe,”<sup>15</sup> backs that argument with the enlargements that took place during the Cold War, focusing on the cases of Greece, Portugal, Spain and Turkey. Those authors do not consider, however, that the political and strategic security circumstances that led the Alliance to include those four countries were significantly different from those after the Cold War, the end of which allowed the Alliance to consider giving “practical content to its long standing vision of a peaceful political order in Europe.”<sup>16</sup> The fact that these countries, with the exception of Turkey, are currently members of the European Union, suggests that NATO has contributed to their development and increasing democratic strength.<sup>17</sup>

As for the post Cold War enlargements, particularly the inclusion of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, one school of thought holds that NATO membership did not speed the democratization process, “because their societies and their elites were committed to democracy anyway. History reveals that these states had made long strides toward democracy even before the NATO carrot was dangled before them.”<sup>18</sup> The other

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<sup>13</sup> Ilkka Kanerva, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav021408b.shtml> (accessed 18 June 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Zoltan Barany, “NATO’s Peaceful Advance,” *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 1(2002): 63.

<sup>15</sup> Dan Reiter, “Why NATO Enlargement Does not Spread Democracy,” *International Security* 14, no. 4 (2001): 42.

<sup>16</sup> David S. Yost, “The New NATO and Collective Security,” *Survival* 40, no. 2 (1998): 35.

<sup>17</sup> Greece became a member of the EU on 1 January 1981, while Portugal and Spain did so on 1 January 1986.

<sup>18</sup> Dan Reiter, “Why NATO Enlargement Does not Spread Democracy,” *International Security* 14, no. 4 (2001): 64.

school of thought, which is the prevailing one, strongly supports the idea that NATO has fostered democracy development in Eastern European countries. More than 20 years since the collapse of communism, there is no doubt that, today, Eastern Europe is more democratic than at any time in its history, and in that regard, “NATO enlargement has been a major element of Europe’s democratic consolidation.”<sup>19</sup> Since the early 1990s, it has been widely agreed that increasingly “shared liberal democratic values and norms are at the heart of NATO’s legitimacy.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the Alliance dedicates significant attention to democratization and defines security as closely linked to democracy. The common Atlantic democratic values, as described by the authors of the Washington Treaty in 1949, “are as constant today as they were when the alliance was created.”<sup>21</sup>

The post-Cold War rounds of NATO enlargement and the Alliance’s security documents and practices “expose a growing link between security and development of democracy.”<sup>22</sup> Liberal democratic values and norms have long been recognized as of paramount importance for the existence and functioning of the transatlantic security community. The desire to be part of Europe, translated into the application for membership in NATO and/or the EU, has been a strong driving force supporting democratic development in Albania as in most Eastern European countries.

The literature on the third wave of democratization increasingly refers to the role of external factors, and focuses on conditionality as one of the dominant and most developed explanations of the EU’s effectiveness in bringing about democratic and market economy reforms in Central and Eastern European countries. In regard to the transition of Eastern European countries, the EU has assumed a prominent role as an

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<sup>19</sup> Martin Erdmann, NATO Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security, “NATO Enlargement-Past Present and Future,” *CROSSROADS-The Macedonian Foreign Policy Journal*, no. 3 (2007): 16 (accessed 22 July 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Fred Tanner, “NATO’s role in Defense Cooperation and Democratization,” [http://www.gcsp.ch/e/publications/Issues\\_Institutions/Int\\_Organisations/Academic\\_Articles/Tanner-IntlSpectator-2004.pdf](http://www.gcsp.ch/e/publications/Issues_Institutions/Int_Organisations/Academic_Articles/Tanner-IntlSpectator-2004.pdf) (accessed 22 July 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Donald Abenheim, “The Big Bang of NATO Enlargement: Gotterdammerung or Rebirth?,” *Strategic Insights* 2, no. 2 (2003).

<sup>22</sup> Sonia Lucarelli, “Peace and Democracy: The rediscovered link. The EU, NATO and the European System of Liberal-Democratic Security Communities,” <http://www.otan.nato.int/acad/fellow/00-02/Lucarelli's.pdf> (accessed 22 July 2009).

external actor. In the case of Albania, conditionality can be defined as an agreement between the EU as an international organization and Albania as the country that must satisfy this organization's requirements to gain membership.

The successful use of conditionality as a political strategy depends, to a large extent, on the "reaction" of the Albanian elites to the EU's stipulations regarding the necessary democratic reforms, which in the long run, will enable Albania to accede to the EU. Two arguments should be noted in relation to conditionality. The first reflects the EU's incentives and concerns, in Heather Grabbe's words, whether the "accession and transition are part of the same process and ... [whether] preparations to join the Union are coterminous with overall development goals."<sup>23</sup> The second argument, as put forward by Kubicek, states that the use of conditionality does not guarantee that changes will occur in the direction intended by the external actor, such as the EU. He, therefore, raises the question "whether and under what conditions can conditionality actually work?"<sup>24</sup>

Both arguments are taken into account in the analysis of Albania-EU relations in this thesis, particularly regarding the financial aid provided by the EU and the negotiation process of stabilization and association agreement.

## **E. METHODS AND SOURCES**

This is basically a case study of the role of international organizations in promoting democratization. However, the arguments analyzed are based on a wide range of literature focusing on transition and democracy development, as well as on the role of international organizations in fostering democratization in other countries of Eastern Europe. The study focuses on the process of democratization in Albania since the collapse of the communist regime, the legacy of the past regime and the leverage exerted by three international organizations—the OSCE, NATO and the EU—in this process.

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<sup>23</sup> Heather Grabbe, "European Union Conditionality and the 'Acquis Communautaire'," *International Political Science Review* 23, no. 3 (2002): 253.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Kubicek, *The European Union and Democratization* (London, New York: Routledge, 2003), 17.

By undertaking a chronological analysis of the post-communist developments in Albania, the thesis investigates the extent to which cooperation and membership in an international organization (the OSCE) helped the country democratize and carry out the democratic reforms necessary for membership in another organization (NATO). The goal of the Albanian people is to make the process of democratization irreversible and sustainable, and thereby a foundation for membership in a third international organization (the EU).

In addition to the sources outlined in the literature review, the thesis relies on other policy declarations, statements by relevant officials, government sources, media sources, scholarly publications, and the author's personal experience.

## **F. THESIS OVERVIEW**

The thesis is organized as follows: Chapter I furnishes background, with a primary focus on the collapse of communism, and the establishment of political pluralism in Albania. Chapter II discusses the OSCE's contribution to the development of democracy in Albania. This chapter also provides information regarding the potential future of the OSCE's presence in Albania and the need for it to continue to provide expertise, particularly in the conduct and monitoring of elections.

Chapter III focuses on the NATO enlargement process, including how criteria for membership affect the spread of democracy. Albanian-NATO relations and NATO's leverage on democratic reforms in Albania are addressed in this chapter. The fourth chapter addresses Albanian-EU relations and focuses on the perspective of Albania joining the EU. Two main instruments used as conditionality levers—progress in access negotiations, and aid and technical assistance—are addressed in this chapter. Literature on this issue mostly covers the steps that Albania is required to take in the accession process rather than the slow pace of reforms. This chapter attempts to fill this gap. Based on research, the last chapter offers conclusions, focusing on further reforms to be carried out by Albania in order to make membership in the EU a reality in the near future.

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## II. ALBANIA AND OSCE

This chapter discusses the role of the OSCE in the democratization process in Albania. It begins with a review of the collapse of the communist regime. It then examines Albania's accession to the CSCE and the importance of CSCE participation for Albania. The chapter continues with the establishment of the OSCE Presence in Albania, its initial mandate, and the activities of the OSCE in Albania since 2003. Finally, this chapter considers the future of the OSCE, both in the international and the Albanian context.

### A. COLLAPSE OF COMMUNIST REGIME IN ALBANIA

Dramatic changes in Eastern European countries followed the speech by U.S. President Ronald Reagan in Berlin in 1987.<sup>25</sup> The end of the Cold War, symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, led the communist countries of Europe to a process of democratic change, which was described by Samuel P. Huntington as a “third wave of democracy.”<sup>26</sup> The international political context of the late 1980s in Eastern Europe had a significant effect in Albania. With the fall of communism in much of Eastern Europe in 1989, prominent intellectuals, labor unions and university students became politically active and began to pressure the government for changes in policy. In

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<sup>25</sup> In 1987, President Ronald Reagan travelled to West Berlin, where he delivered a noteworthy speech on the theme of freedom. The speech was considered somewhat provocative at the time, and Reagan's own State Department had opposed the inclusion of the now-famous phrase "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" The timing, however, was prophetic. On November 9, 1989, after Mikhail Gorbachev informed the West that the Soviet Union would no longer force Eastern European nations to stay within the Soviet orbit, the East German government opened the wall—effectively "tearing down" the barrier between not only East and West Berlin, but East and West Germany as well, <http://www.nationalcenter.org/ReaganBerlinWall1987.html> (accessed 17 June 2009).

<sup>26</sup> “At the end of the decade, the democratic wave engulfed the communist world. In 1988 Hungary began the transition to a multiparty system. In 1989 elections for a national congress in the Soviet Union produced the defeat of several senior communist party leaders and an increasingly assertive national parliament. In early 1990, multiparty systems were developing in the Baltic Republics and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) abandoned its guiding role. In 1989, in Poland Solidarity swept the elections for a national parliament and a noncommunist government came into existence. In 1990 the leader of Solidarity, Lech Walesa, was elected president, replacing the communist Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski. In the last months of 1989, the communist regimes in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Romania collapsed and competitive elections in these countries were held in 1990. In Bulgaria the communist regime also began to liberalize.” Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave* (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Publishing Division of the University, 1993), 23–24.

response to these pressures, Albanian citizens were granted the right to travel abroad, some free-market measures for the economy were adopted, and religious freedom was restored. However, the government continued to tighten border control, and many young people were shot dead in their attempts to cross the border. The secret service was still strong and active in applying a hard policy against those opposed to the regime. In July 1990, a large number of Albanians sought refuge on the territory of the Western Embassies in Tirana in their attempt to flee the country. This was a heavy blow for the government, as well as a clear indication of the communists' decline of support in the nation's internal politics. Regardless of the government's further steps, mainly propagandistic and demagogic, the situation was deteriorating and international pressure was increasing. The concessions made were not sufficient to avoid the escalation of popular pressure for more political changes. Albania's application to join the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) was rejected and made conditional to further political reforms and measures to ensure respect for human rights.

With increasing international and domestic pressure for political changes, in December 1990, President Ramiz Alia was forced to accept political pluralism. This signaled an end to the communist party's official monopoly of power. Following the strong demonstrations of university students, the creation of the first anti-communist party, in December 1990, marked the end of 45 years of communist rule and the establishment of a multiparty democracy in Albania. The "demonstration effect" as described by Huntington, with reference to the examples of other Eastern European countries, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Romania in particular, otherwise called "neighborhood effects,"<sup>27</sup> had a strong impact on Albania and contributed to the collapse of the communist regime. In contrast with the violent upheaval in Romania, the collapse of communism in Albania was made through a peaceful process as "the later democratizers learned about dangers to be avoided and difficulties to be overcome."<sup>28</sup> However, Albania was the last East European country to put an end to the communist

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<sup>27</sup> Dirk Berg-Schlosser, "Neighborhood Effects of Democratization in Europe," *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 4, no. 2 (2008): 29–45.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave* (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Publishing Division of the University, 1993), 101.

regime. Different from the rest of the East European countries, in which the communist rule began to appear “softened,” allowing for some forms of political and economic liberalization, Albania experienced the harshest totalitarian regime in Europe for almost 45 years. Complete isolation from the rest of the world was a characteristic of the communist regime in Albania. The “independent” or “national” communism, as asserted by Enver Hoxha in Albania, “proved to be an even greater handicap than sovietization, allowing postcommunist national elites to sidetrack the democratic transition.”<sup>29</sup>

The first pluralist elections, which were held on 31 March 1991, failed to make a break with the communist past. The Party of Labor of Albania (PLA) won the elections, gaining more support in the rural areas than in the urban areas. However, the new Democratic Party (DP) won in the main cities of Albania. The newly formed government was forced to resign after three months, due to its failure to effectively manage the hard economic situation. “The Albanians emerged from communism ill prepared for the painful transition to a market economy. The abrupt dismantling of the communist social welfare system, combined with the soaring rate of unemployment, left many citizens in a precarious position. . . . Moreover, the population in general, as well as the emerging political and economic elites, were unfamiliar with the workings of a market economy.”<sup>30</sup> The main political parties reached an agreement to form a coalition government and hold early elections in March 1992.

The first international reaction was the acceptance of Albania as a participating state in the CSCE. Enjoying strong international support, the DP won a landslide victory in the elections on 22 March 1992. Ramiz Alia stepped down, and the DP leader, Sali Berisha, was elected president. “He pushed through a number of economic reforms, including mass privatization, and Albania received a substantial amount of assistance from the U.S., EU, IMF and World Bank.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Jacques Rupnik, “Eastern Europe: The International Context,” *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 2 (2000): 120.

<sup>30</sup> Elez Biberaj, *Albania in Transition: The Rocky Road to Democracy* (Westview Press, 1998), 73.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Kubicek, “Albania’s Collapse and Reconstruction,” *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 3, no.1 (1998): 2.

This was the beginning of a new era for Albania. The assistance received from the West was an indication of the support for the new democratic government and President Berisha. During this period, Albania joined NATO's Partnership for Peace<sup>32</sup> and the Council of Europe.<sup>33</sup> Berisha skillfully used the international support to strengthen his internal positions. "His cautious foreign policy and his image as a modernizer won him plaudits, and he was able to use his reputation in the West to strengthen his domestic political position."<sup>34</sup>

However, internal politics were characterized by Berisha's increasing authoritarianism which had been a frequent phenomenon in central and Eastern European countries in the transition from communism to the Western system. In a short time, Berisha succeeded in removing from office the General Prosecutor and the Chair of the Supreme Court. By this time, Berisha had complete control over the judiciary system, and the secret service had been reconstructed to serve the DP's interests.

## **B. ACCESSION OF ALBANIA TO OSCE**

Trying to improve the image of the regime internationally, throughout 1990 the communists requested that Albania be awarded the status of a CSCE participating state. In June 1990, at the Copenhagen meeting, Albania was granted the status of a CSCE observer, a sign of Western support for the improvement of human rights in the country. However, Albania had much to do in order to become a participating state in the CSCE. Messages from the CSCE, and its participating states, to Albania were clear: the country must accept political pluralism and establish a market economy. In a statement in May 1990, the U.S. Helsinki Commission emphasized: "As a participant in the Helsinki process, Albania will have to commit itself to respect the rights of its citizens to freedom of expression, association, and assembly, as well as freedom of movement. It will accept the concepts of political pluralism and the rule of law and to that end move toward free

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<sup>32</sup> Albania signed the PfP Agreement on 23 February 1994.

<sup>33</sup> Albania joined the Council of Europe on 13 November 1995.

<sup>34</sup> Hugh Miall, "The OSCE role in Albania: A Success of Conflict Prevention?," *Helsinki Monitor* 8, no.4 (1997): 76.

elections and undertake necessary legal reforms.”<sup>35</sup> In September 1990, Ramiz Alia<sup>36</sup> attended the UN General Assembly session “in an attempt to improve the image of his regime and to make a personal plea for Albania’s admittance as a full member of the CSCE.”<sup>37</sup> In October 1990, Albania hosted the meeting of the Balkan Foreign Ministers’ Conference in an attempt to begin a new era of foreign policy. At the same time, Albania hoped to receive the support of neighboring countries for its full participation in the CSCE.

Further attempts to receive status as a participating state failed also at the CSCE Paris meeting of November 1990. “The implication of this event was that Albania needed to carry out fundamental reforms in order to be accepted as a full-fledged member of the international community.”<sup>38</sup> However, the international pressure on Albania for political pluralism and respect for human rights proved to be critical factors in the collapse of the communist regime.

Intense developments followed the first pluralist elections, which were held on 31 March 1991. The newly formed communist government was forced to resign and a new coalition government was formed following an agreement of Albanian political parties. “The agreement between the communists and the opposition parties . . . symbolized a shared determination to prevent the country from sinking into total chaos.”<sup>39</sup> The reaction of the CSCE participating states was immediate. On 19 June 1991, very shortly after the new coalition government was approved by the National Assembly, Albania was accorded full recognition as a participating state of the CSCE. “Membership afforded Albania a degree of protection against external aggression that it probably had not enjoyed previously. It also committed Albania to respect existing international

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<sup>35</sup> U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, CSCE News release (Washington D.C.) 10 May 1990, quoted in: Elez Biberaj, *Albania in Transition: The Rocky Road to Democracy* (Westview Press, 1998), 41.

<sup>36</sup> Ramiz Alia was the successor of Enver Hoxha. By this time, Alia was the first secretary of the Party of Labor of Albania and Chair of the National People’s Assembly.

<sup>37</sup> Elez Biberaj, *Albania in Transition: The Rocky Road to Democracy* (Westview Press, 1998), 57.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

boundaries in Europe and basic human rights and political freedoms at home.”<sup>40</sup> Albania was henceforth included in the agenda of senior international leaders and officials, a sign of support on its road to democratic development.

The visit of James Baker, then the U.S. Secretary of State, the first high-level visit ever made by an American official to Albania, on 22 June 1991, only three days after Albania was admitted as a participating state of the CSCE, was a clear indication of the United States’ support for democratic and economic reform in Albania. Baker said, "On behalf of President Bush and the American people, I come here today to say to you: Freedom works. At last, you are free to think your own thoughts. At last you are free to speak your own mind. At last you are free to choose your own leaders. Albanians have chosen to join the company of free men and women everywhere."<sup>41</sup> In his speech in the presence of hundreds of thousands of people jammed into the main square of Tirana, Baker urged the Albanian people to move forward to democracy, as the country could not afford delay.

### **C. IMPORTANCE OF OSCE PARTICIPATION FOR ALBANIA**

With 56 states drawn from Europe, Central Asia and North America, the OSCE (formerly the CSCE) is the world's largest regional security organization, bringing comprehensive and co-operative security to a region that stretches from Vancouver to Vladivostok. It offers a forum for political negotiations and decision-making in the fields of early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation, and puts the political will of the participating states into practice through its unique network of field missions.<sup>42</sup> Its first major document, the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, was

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<sup>40</sup> Evolution of National Security Policy, <http://countrystudies.us/albania/153.htm> (accessed 17 December 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Speech of the U.S. Secretary of State, James Baker, in Tirana, 22 June 1991. Cited from The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/06/23/world/300000-albanians-pour-into-streets-to-welcome-baker.html?pagewanted=1> (accessed 15 July 2009).

<sup>42</sup> OSCE, <http://www.osce.org/about/> (accessed 17 June 2009).

designed to guide relations between participating states, and it “broadened the concept of security far beyond the way states and most experts thought about international security.”<sup>43</sup>

Inclusiveness in participation is often described as the main advantage of the organization. In contrast with NATO and the EU, which “were particularly influential over the last fifteen years or so in their immediate neighborhoods because they were able to offer the prospect of membership in return for adherence to their rules or for following their examples,”<sup>44</sup> the CSCE’s conditionality for participation is not highly exigent. However, CSCE participation had genuine significance for Albania after a period of 45 years of communist rule. The period since the end of the Cold War has been characterized by political uncertainty. Albania’s participation in the CSCE meant having an important channel of communication with other countries and institutions and “being present when the parties debate issues of European security.”<sup>45</sup> With Albania in, the CSCE could be more effective in influencing future democracy developments in the country. Accession to the CSCE marks the start of a period of state socialization for Albania. According to Emilian Kavalski, “This socialization occurs in terms of altering policy-making through compliance and learning, and in changing external behavior.”<sup>46</sup>

Participation in the CSCE, and shortly thereafter, membership in other international organizations, including the Council of Europe and the International Monetary Fund, opened Albania to the socializing influences of international agents, enabling the country to build the democratic institutions and capacities required to carry out and implement its international obligations. This process would prepare the country for future membership in the principal Euro-Atlantic organizations—NATO and the EU. The complexity and dynamics of this process constituted a real challenge for the Albanian people and state elites. With its “ups and downs,” the process took a longer

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<sup>43</sup> Paul Dunay, “The OSCE in Crisis,” *Chaillot Paper* no. 88 (2006): 20.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Emilian Kavalski, *Extending the European Security Community, Constructing Peace in the Balkans* 61.

time than anticipated, because of the difficulties of the transformation of elites and the reform of government, and the relative lack of a unifying theory and plan for such political and social reforms with the aid of multinational organizations.

#### **D. ESTABLISHING THE OSCE PRESENCE IN ALBANIA**

Field missions are the major assets of the OSCE helping “the organization carry out its functions effectively.”<sup>47</sup> The geographic focus of the field missions has been concentrated in the former Soviet Union states and the Western Balkans, including Albania. The OSCE engagement in South-Eastern Europe, in particular, “has defined the modern history of the OSCE. . . . The OSCE has been in this region every step of the way since the early 1990s, walking with the peoples and communities of the countries of South-Eastern Europe through tension and war and working tirelessly to build peace and confidence.”<sup>48</sup> The 1999 Istanbul OSCE summit pointed out that “the development of OSCE field operations represents a major transformation of the Organization that has enabled the OSCE to play a more prominent role in promoting peace, security and compliance with OSCE commitments.”<sup>49</sup> Cooperation with the host countries is critical for carrying out the mission mandate. “Field missions have turned out to be an effective tool for managing pre-conflict and post-conflict situations because they put internationals on the ground for the long term, where they can understand the dynamics and build relationships with local officials.”<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, field missions have been instruments for enhancing cooperation between the OSCE and other international organizations operating in their respective states.

The establishment of the OSCE Presence in Albania is related to the crisis in early 1997, which was caused by the collapse of pyramid financial schemes, not atypical of the phenomena associated with the capitalist transition after 1989 in certain parts of Europe.

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Dunay, “The OSCE in Crisis,” 59.

<sup>48</sup> Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, “The OSCE and South Eastern Europe,” *CROSSROADS-The Macedonian Foreign Policy Journal* 10 (2006): 105.

<sup>49</sup> Istanbul Summit Declaration, 19 November 1999, [http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/1999/11/4050\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/1999/11/4050_en.pdf) (accessed 17 June 2009).

<sup>50</sup> Robert L. Barry, “The Future of the OSCE, British American Security Information Council Special Report,” 2003/1, 42, <http://www.basicint.org/pubs/futureosce-fin.pdf> (accessed 18 June 2009).



The despair and discontent of the people were expressed in spontaneous and increasingly violent demonstrations that turned into riots and finally into an uprising. “By the time pyramid schemes began to fail at the beginning of 1997, Albania had no functioning democratic institutions or fora through which the mounting public discontent could have been channeled.”<sup>51</sup>

The violence was then transformed into a largely uncoordinated uprising against the Berisha regime. The use of public order police, secret police and army troops against the protesters added fuel to the fire. Hundreds of thousands of weapons were taken from military depots, the authority of the police collapsed, and the country descended into anarchy. Albania’s apparent economic miracle turned into an economic and social disaster.

The uprising focused international attention on Albania. The need for coordinated action propelled the OSCE into a mediator position. The OSCE Chairman in Office designated the former Austrian Chancellor, Franz Vranitzky, to mediate between Berisha and the opposition parties. His main task was to conduct a dialogue among Albanian political leaders during the run-up to the early parliamentary elections scheduled for 29 June 1997. The arrangement to replace the DP government by what was called the government of National Reconciliation, under a Socialist Prime Minister, was agreed by the main Albanian political parties on 9 March 1997. “The situation in Albania in 1997 presented a formidable task for the newly formed OSCE Presence. Earlier that year, this long isolated Balkan country, a newly admitted member to the OSCE and Council of Europe, found itself sliding into crisis. Following attacks on political targets, criminal activity mushroomed. Many Albanian citizens fled to Italy and Greece. Foreigners were evacuated. In short, the government had lost control of the country.”<sup>52</sup>

Vranitzky’s highly effective diplomatic performance and his excellent negotiations skills in interactions with various Albanian political actors were critical in

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<sup>51</sup> Gabriel Partos, “Albania Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management 1, <http://www.ciaonet.org/wps/pag01/> (accessed 16 March 2009).

<sup>52</sup> Franz Vranitzky, “The OSCE Presence in Albania,” 177, <http://www.core-hamburg.de/documents/yearbook/english/98/Vranitzky.pdf> (accessed 16 March 2009).

managing the crisis. Furthermore, “Vranitzky’s efforts were helped by the broad unity of purpose of the key foreign countries, the U.S. as well as Italy and Greece within the EU. As several governments now judged Berisha to have become a destabilizing force in Albania and possibly beyond his country’s borders, their publicly unstated purpose was to ease Berisha out of office through the ballot box.”<sup>53</sup>

#### **E. INITIAL MANDATE OF THE OSCE**

Thanks to this strong international support, Vranitzky’s mission paved the way for the establishment of the OSCE Presence in Albania in March 1997. The initial mandate included two main areas: (a) democratization, the media and human rights; and (b) election preparation and monitoring. In a climate of high political tension and total lack of public order, the preparation and conduct of elections were not easy tasks. On 28 March 1997, the UN Security Council authorized a group of member countries, led by Italy, to establish a multi-national protection force (MPF) in Albania. The OSCE’s primary role was to keep the election preparation timetable on track and to ensure that the election would be held under the best possible conditions. “In his attempts Vranitzky’s main weapon was the threat that no foreign assistance would be forthcoming unless a democratic vote was held to produce a credible administration. This was a potent message. Albania was, once again, in desperate need of financial help. No Albanian political leader could risk the prospect of being blamed for depriving his country of foreign aid.”<sup>54</sup>

Regardless of the public order issue (especially in the southern part of Albania) the OSCE was able to provide a contingent of over 500 international observers, including 100 parliamentarians, the largest mission ever dispatched in Albania. With regard to technical assistance, the OSCE was directly involved in advising the Central Election Commission, writing training brochures for the election officials, printing ballot papers (to ensure complete secrecy, they were printed in Italy), and distributing them all around

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<sup>53</sup> Gabriel Partos, “Albania Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management,” 4. <http://www.ciaonet.org/wps/pag01/> (accessed 16 March 2009).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

the country. Although the situation in Albania was hardly conducive to free and fair elections, the 29 June 1997 elections took place relatively smoothly. “Although great difficulties during the past few weeks caused many observers to doubt the ability of the Albanian authorities to conduct successful elections, the large turnout of voters demonstrated that Albania, in close co-operation with the OSCE, was able to hold elections in a reasonably orderly fashion.”<sup>55</sup>

While the OSCE final report qualified these elections as “acceptable given the prevailing circumstances,” it lacked qualitative expressions such as “the elections were free and fair,” “the elections met international standards” or “the elections were in compliance with OSCE and Council of Europe commitments.” Rather than an assessment of the election process, the final report was, instead, a strong appeal by the OSCE addressed to the Albanian political class. “The results of this election can be the foundation for a stable democratic system, which Albanians want and deserve. It is essential, however, that all Albanian political parties observe the commitments they have made to respect the results of the election and not to interfere in any way with the counting process or the conduct of the second round. We recall that the international community expects a major effort towards national reconciliation after the elections. Without such reconciliation, there will be no basis for defining the terms of international aid.”<sup>56</sup> As anticipated, the Socialist Party won the elections. In accordance with a declaration made prior to the elections, President Berisha resigned and a new socialist-led coalition government was formed.

The conduct of the 29 June 1997 elections was a success for the OSCE Presence in Albania. By this time, the OSCE was highly respected and favorably accepted throughout the country. However, this was only the first step in the process of the rehabilitation and establishment of democratic institutions in Albania, a process in which the OSCE was prepared to play a key instrumental role. The new government faced the

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<sup>55</sup> OSCE Preliminary Statement, 2, [http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/1997/06/1177\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/1997/06/1177_en.pdf) (accessed 17 March 2009).

<sup>56</sup> Final Report Parliamentary Elections in Albania 29 June–6 July 1997, 4, [http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/1997/08/1181\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/1997/08/1181_en.pdf) (accessed 17 March 2009).

enormous tasks of restoring public confidence in the state and rebuilding the country from scratch. Establishing public order was a critical issue, given the 700,000 small arms illegally possessed by the population.

This required both short-term specific projects as well as long-term financial and technical assistance. The World Bank, the IMF and the EU became important players in this process. “After the elections the [OSCE] Presence, besides helping the country to arrange its relations with the donor community, entered into close relationship with its many and varied Albanian partners in order to encourage social and political dialogue, and to strengthen democratic values and culture in the country.”<sup>57</sup>

Later in 1997, the OSCE Presence was charged with coordinating the work of other international organizations and bilateral donors. Thus, the OSCE became the core of the “Friends of Albania Group,” by assuming a leading role in bringing both domestic and international actors together to work on stabilizing the situation. The group included ambassadors to Albania from the European Union (EU) countries, the United States, the European Commission, and the Council of Europe.

The Istanbul Summit reaffirmed the OSCE commitment “to assist Albania as it continues its social, political and economic reform process following the setbacks caused by the upheaval of 1997 and the Kosovo refugee crisis of 1999. Noting the recent progress, we call upon the Government and all political parties to improve the political atmosphere, thereby strengthening democratic institutions. We encourage the new Government of Albania to continue its fight against crime and corruption. The OSCE is committed to continue its assistance and to work closely with the European Union and international organizations within the framework of the Friends of Albania.”<sup>58</sup>

Subsequent to the close attention to the fragile political situation, in addition to helping mediate between the main political parties, the OSCE Presence developed a range of long-term human dimension activities, as well as media and NGO support.

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<sup>57</sup> Franz Vranitzky, “The OSCE Presence in Albania,” 178, <http://www.core-hamburg.de/documents/yearbook/english/98/Vranitzky.pdf> (accessed 16 March 2009).

<sup>58</sup> Istanbul Summit Document, 19 November 1999, 47, [http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/1999/11/4050\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/1999/11/4050_en.pdf) (accessed 17 June 2009).

Furthermore, with the establishment of the Parliamentary Commission responsible for drafting the constitution, the OSCE Presence was directly involved in the drafting process.

In order to expand its capacities to assist in the development of the rule of law in Albania, the OSCE Presence opened its Office of the Legal Counselor in the first half of 1998. At this time, to help facilitate OSCE activities out of Tirana, field offices were established in three other main cities in Albania. A military and security liaison officer was appointed to facilitate assistance to the Albanian police in developing an arms collection program. It was the OSCE contribution that the main European Parliamentary Institutions (including the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE and the Council of Europe) visited in Albania twice (in December 1997 and June 1998) to appeal to the Albanian political class for closer cooperation concerning the country's priorities in the process of building democracy and strengthening democratic institutions.

With the main opposition party (DP) boycott of the Parliament, the OSCE Presence initiated and organized a systematic multi-institution program to observe parliamentary procedures. This included issuing bi-weekly reports on parliament, and sharing them with political parties and representatives of diplomatic and international organizations. However, pursuant to its mandate, until 2003 the main focus of the OSCE Presence continued to be election assistance and monitoring. In addition to the elections in 1997, the assistance continued with the national referendum for the constitution, local government elections in 2000, and parliamentary elections in 2001.

The assistance aimed at strengthening the management and administrative capacities of election management bodies, the Central Election Commission in particular, improving voters' lists and civil registries, training local election administration staff, and delivering a nation-wide voter education campaign.

#### **F. OSCE ACTIVITY AFTER 2003**

The beginning of 2003 is, beyond any doubt, a significant milestone in the development of democracy in Albania. During his visit to Albania on 31 January 2003,

Romano Prodi, then the President of the European Commission, opened negotiations on the Stabilization and Association Agreement<sup>59</sup> between the EU and Albania.

Taking into account the progress made by Albania in consolidating democratic institutions, as well as the increasingly central position that the country's institutions have taken, the Permanent Council of the OSCE decided to update the OSCE Presence Mandate to reflect the developments in Albania. According to the new mandate, the OSCE Presence will focus on: legislative and judicial reform, including property reform; regional administrative reform; electoral reform; parliamentary capacity-building; anti-trafficking and anti-corruption measures, including supporting the implementation of relevant national strategies; development of effective laws and regulations on the independent media and its Code of Conduct; promotion of good governance and targeted projects for strengthening civil society; and police assistance, in particular, training for border police, within a coordinated framework with other international actors in the field.<sup>60</sup> The new mandate provided for more OSCE input in building democratic institutions and strengthening democracy in Albania. The OSCE made contributions in four main areas during this period: property reform, address and civil registry modernization, parliamentary support, and electoral reform.

The issues of property rights and security of tenure and ownership have a distinct impact on the social, economic and political aspects of Albania. The lack of secure property rights hinders the economic development of the country as well as the development of a property market. This contributes to corruption and is the main source of civil court disputes. Property registration information is needed to support a wide variety of current initiatives such as the resolution of the property restitution and compensation issue, the on-going process of government decentralization, urban and

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<sup>59</sup> The Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) is a central instrument of the Stabilization and Association process (SAP), which aims at accompanying and supporting South-Eastern European countries on their paths towards the EU. The Stabilization and Association Agreement includes provisions covering political dialogue, regional co-operation, trade, movement of goods, services, people and capital, establishment, justice and home affairs, and co-operation in a wide range of areas, [http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/en/content/president\\_prodi\\_to\\_visit\\_albania\\_and\\_open\\_negotiations\\_for\\_a\\_stabilization\\_and\\_association\\_a](http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/en/content/president_prodi_to_visit_albania_and_open_negotiations_for_a_stabilization_and_association_a) (accessed 10 June 2009).

<sup>60</sup> Decision no. 588: Mandate of the OSCE Presence in Albania, [http://www.osce.org/documents/pia/2003/12/1723\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/pia/2003/12/1723_en.pdf) (accessed 24 February 2009).

regional planning, and improvements to the country's infrastructure, tourism development and natural resource management. The OSCE Presence's involvement in the field of property dates back to 2002, when it launched a political process to draft the Law on Restitution and Compensation of Property.

High demographic mobility, especially after 1997, strongly demanded that the update of the civil registry reflect the on-going changes due to this unregulated mobility. The OSCE is helping the government modernize the address and civil registry system. This effort is part of the Technical Assistance Project, which is funded by the European Union, the United States and the OSCE. The project, among others, aims at implementing modern address and civil registration systems, reviewing the required legislation, and providing capacity building to relevant central and local institutions.<sup>61</sup> The most important output of the project is the creation of the electronic National Register of Citizens, which will serve as the data source to a number of public services in the country, including ID card applications. Creation of the electronic register will also help improve the quality of voter lists in Albania, an issue that has been debated in past elections in the country.

Leaving behind the first phase (2001–2006), which was focused mainly on training parliament staff, the new OSCE project for 2008–2010 intends to help the Assembly become more transparent and to strengthen its efficiency and oversight responsibilities.<sup>62</sup> Specific support is foreseen for parliamentary committees with a focus on European integration issues. The project, which is funded by the Netherlands, is intended to help the National Assembly become a more effective institution that can fulfill its role as a forum of political debate and a mechanism for government oversight and control. At the same time, the National Assembly should become a more transparent and responsive institution that takes public opinion into consideration.

As mentioned previously, election assistance has been one of the primary areas of OSCE assistance in Albania. While that assistance started in 1997, it is still a central

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<sup>61</sup> OSCE Presence in Albania, <http://www.osce.org/albania/25930.html> (accessed 24 February 2009).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

focus of OSCE activity. Elections are one of the most important instruments of democracy, and the way in which they are conducted is a fundamental indicator of a country's democratic development. Prior to 1997, Albania lacked the institutional capacities to manage elections or educate citizens about democratic politics. To meet these needs, the OSCE provided assistance and expertise to the Central Election Commission (CEC) in election planning and administration, and to government institutions and the National Assembly in electoral law development.

The OSCE electoral unit is involved in planning and carrying out further reform of the legal framework for elections, and it helps build the capacity of relevant national institutions and civil society actors.<sup>63</sup> OSCE election assistance in Albania has been shaped to comply with the ODIHR recommendations after each election.

Polarization of the election administration in Albania, complex and problematic rules for the allocation of parliamentary mandates, the adjudication of complaints and appeals, and the transparency of the election process have been the main concerns regarding elections in Albania. Hence, OSCE assistance has focused on drafting and improving electoral laws. Other technical aspects of elections were addressed by other international organizations such as the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI).

In June 2007, OSCE/ODIHR and the European Commission for Democracy through Law (known as the Venice Commission) issued a joint opinion on the amendments to the electoral code of Albania,<sup>64</sup> with the intention of assisting the Albanian authorities in their stated objective to further improve the national legal framework for democratic elections. ODIHR observation reports issued after each election, in addition to the problems identified, also reflect the progress made by the Albanian institutions in election administration. These reports show the ups and downs of the election progress in Albania. For example, according to a 2003 report, "The 12 October 2003 local government elections in the Republic of Albania marked further

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<sup>63</sup> OSCE Presence in Albania, <http://www.osce.org/albania/18641.html> (accessed 24 February 2009).

<sup>64</sup> Draft joint opinion on amendments to the Electoral Code of the Republic of Albania, [http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2007/07/25459\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2007/07/25459_en.pdf) (accessed 25 February 2009).



progress towards compliance with OSCE, Council of Europe and other international commitments and standards for democratic elections.”<sup>65</sup>

According to a 2005 report, “The conduct of the 3 July 2005 parliamentary elections, during the pre-election period, voting, and counting so far, complied only partially with OSCE Commitments, Council of Europe commitments, and other international standards for democratic elections.”<sup>66</sup> However, the same report identified good progress with regard to technical aspects of election administration: “For the most part, the CEC administered the process transparently, professionally and in line with the provisions of the Electoral Code.”<sup>67</sup>

The next elections held in Albania were those for local government in February 2007. “While the 18 February 2007 local elections provided for a competitive contest, they were another missed opportunity for Albania to conduct elections fully in line with OSCE Commitments, Council of Europe commitments and other international standards for democratic elections.”<sup>68</sup> As noted, OSCE/ODIHR assessments of the elections in Albania vary from “marked further progress” and “complied only partially with OSCE Commitments, Council of Europe commitments, and other international standards for democratic election” to they were “another missed opportunity for Albania to conduct elections fully in line with” these commitments and standards. The ODIHR reports not only provide guidance about what needs to be accomplished for an election to be in compliance with international standards, they also appeal to the OSCE to continue to provide assistance and expertise to Albanian institutions and political parties. The

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<sup>65</sup> ODIHR: International Election Observation Mission. Local Government Elections 12 October 2003 Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, 1, [http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2003/10/730\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2003/10/730_en.pdf) (accessed 25 February 2009).

<sup>66</sup> ODIHR: International Election Observation Mission. Parliamentary Elections Republic of Albania 3 July 2005 Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, 1, [http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2005/07/15541\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2005/07/15541_en.pdf) (accessed 25 February 2009).

<sup>67</sup> ODIHR: International Election Observation Mission. Parliamentary Elections Republic of Albania 3 July 2005 Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions. 2, [http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2005/07/15541\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2005/07/15541_en.pdf) (accessed 25 February 2009).

<sup>68</sup> ODIHR: International Election Observation Mission. Republic of Albania Local Elections 18 February 2007. Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, 1, [http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2007/02/23347\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2007/02/23347_en.pdf) (accessed 25 February 2009).

creation of the electronic National Civil Registry and the new Electoral Code are significant examples of the OSCE's continuing contribution to the further democratization of Albania.

## **G. THE FUTURE OF THE OSCE IN ALBANIA**

### **1. International Context**

The new political situation in Europe, especially with the enlargement of NATO and the EU, has raised the issue of the future of the OSCE in the new international security context in Europe. Since its inception, the OSCE has always been instrumental in “the transformation of Europe from the Cold War to the post-Cold War era,”<sup>69</sup> reflecting the changing needs of participating states as well as the transforming context of European and global affairs. The EU, the Council of Europe, and NATO address some of the same issues as the OSCE but from different angles or perspectives, and they “have all more or less successfully adapted to the new international political and security landscape.”<sup>70</sup> At the same time, with the successful enlargement of the EU and NATO, “there is a tendency at the political level to devote less attention to the OSCE, which has increasingly disappeared from public view. In many countries, the OSCE is rarely placed high on political agendas in Capitals.”<sup>71</sup> However, the critical situation of the OSCE requires high-level political attention by the participating states. Furthermore, “the OSCE institutions should be restructured to reflect today’s challenges from the emerging new security architecture of Europe.”<sup>72</sup>

After more than 30 years of activity, the Finnish Foreign Minister has declared, what the OSCE needs at the moment is “a new spirit of Helsinki.”<sup>73</sup> To this end, it is not

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<sup>69</sup> Paul Dunay, “The OSCE in Crisis,” *Chaillot Paper* no. 88, (2006): 89.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>71</sup> “The Future of the OSCE,” A Joint Project of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Swiss Institute for World Affairs, Washington, 5–6 June 2005, 6, [http://www.osce.org/documents/pa/2005/06/15378\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/pa/2005/06/15378_en.pdf) (accessed 18 June 2009).

<sup>72</sup> Robert Berry, “The future of the OSCE” British American Security Council, 2003/1, 11, <http://www.basicint.org/pubs/futureosce-fin.pdf> (accessed 19 June 2009).

<sup>73</sup> Ilkka Kanerva, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav021408b.shtml> (accessed 18 June 2009).

a coincidence that the OSCE Ministerial Council held in Helsinki in December 2008 addressed the necessity for a revitalization of the organization and the need to change current practices of cooperation. The President of Finland said, “We should not assume that current practices of co-operation will continue forever unchanged. In discussing our future co-operation we should, however, build on the solid foundation of our common values and commitments. They have enabled Europe to broaden democracy, strengthen the rule of law and bring universal human rights and fundamental freedoms to its people.”<sup>74</sup> Regardless of the significant changes in Europe, the OSCE has proved to be a highly adaptable institution. Meeting future challenges successfully will require the understanding, dialogue and support of all participating states. To this end, the informal meeting of the OSCE foreign ministers launched the “Corfu Process” in order to take the European security dialogue forward.<sup>75</sup>

The Athens Ministerial Council of the OSCE on 1–2 December 2009 further advanced the dialogue on European security, and it provided “an important opportunity to send out a clear message of unity on the need for enhanced dialogue complemented by joint action.”<sup>76</sup> The declaration adopted at this OSCE Ministerial Council called for the re-establishment of trust and confidence and urged participating states to “do more to promote human rights and foster tolerance.”<sup>77</sup> According to the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Greek Prime Minister and Foreign Minister George Papandreou, “addressing security problems in the OSCE area would be a long-term endeavour.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic of Finland, Opening Speech of the 16<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Council in Helsinki on 4 December 2008, <http://formin.finland.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=144318&nodeid=15149&contentlan=2&culture=en-US> (accessed 18 June 2009).

<sup>75</sup> On 28 June 2009, the OSCE Ministers of Foreign Affairs met in Corfu, for the first time in an informal setting, in order to discuss the current challenges and future perspectives of the common, indivisible, comprehensive and cooperative security, which has ostensibly marked the post-Cold-War European security architecture.

<sup>76</sup> Greek President Karolos Papoulias welcoming the ministers and high-level representatives at the opening session of the Athens Ministerial Council, 1–2 December 2009, <http://www.osce.org/item/41670.html> (accessed 8 December 2009).

<sup>77</sup> Declaration adopted at OSCE Ministerial Council in Athens charts way ahead for dialogue on European security, <http://www.osce.org/item/41670.html> (accessed 8 December 2009).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

## 2. National Context

The OSCE has a long history of providing assistance to Albania, which began with the country's accession as a participating state in 1991. Since the establishment of the OSCE Presence in Albania in 1997, Albania-OSCE relations have covered a wide range of activities, from crisis management to democratic consolidation. The progress made by Albania in strengthening democratic institutions, the rule of law, and respect for human rights and minorities constitutes a factor of stability and security in the region.

This progress is also a clear indicator of the OSCE's contribution over the years. The long history of assistance has been mutually fruitful, not only for Albania as host country, but also for the OSCE. It is an example of cooperation that leads to peace and stronger social and political institutions. The OSCE priority has been to strengthen and consolidate democratic institutions and values, good governance and the rule of law, as well as to foster regional cooperation, in order to accelerate Albania's integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions. The OSCE Presence in Albania has also been the key partner in the implementation of joint projects with the EU, through the European Commission, the Council of Europe and other international organizations and institutions. However, it should be noted that OSCE missions are not intended to stay forever.

The Istanbul Document of 1999 points out the importance of the field missions. It also provides that "the host country of an OSCE field operation should, when appropriate, be assisted in building its own capacity and expertise within the area of responsibility. This would facilitate an efficient transfer of the tasks of the operation to the host country, and consequently the closure of the field operation."<sup>79</sup>

In line with the international debate on the future of the OSCE, in 2008, the Albanian government called for the limitation of the OSCE mandate to reflect the new

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<sup>79</sup> Istanbul Summit Document, 19 November 1999, 10, [http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/1999/11/4050\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/1999/11/4050_en.pdf) (accessed 18 June 2009).

democratic reality in the country. A senior government official stated, “Albania has reached a level where it needs to be in charge of processes using the growing professional capacities of Albanian institutions.”<sup>80</sup>

Two important events in the development of democracy in Albania should be noted. First, the process of negotiations with the European Union, which officially started on 31 January 2003, was finalized with the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement between the Republic of Albania and the European Communities on 12 June 2006. The SAA became effective following its ratification by the parliaments of 25 member states and the Albanian Parliament.<sup>81</sup> Second, the issue of the mandate of the OSCE Presence in Albania was raised shortly after the NATO Summit at Bucharest,<sup>82</sup> where the NATO Allies invited Albania to join the Alliance. With Albania then close to NATO membership, the assumption was that the OSCE should adapt its mandate pursuant to the new reality of the country. While official communications with the OSCE headquarters were not made public, various daily newspapers published communications between the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the OSCE Chairman in Office. The intention of the Albanian government seems to have been to make NATO membership the first step in the “phase-out cycle” of the OSCE presence in the country.

The opposition strongly objected to the idea and related it to the government’s wish to avoid the OSCE Presence’s involvement in the elections to the National Assembly scheduled for 28 June 2009. Other international institutions, while supporting the OSCE’s contribution to the democratization of the country, called the request unnecessary.

Although Albania has made remarkable progress in the process of integration to Euro-Atlantic structures, much still remains to be done in fighting organized crime and corruption, promoting the rule of law, reforming the judicial system, conducting electoral

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<sup>80</sup>Lulzim Basha, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania, [http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en\\_GB/newsbriefs/setimes/newsbriefs/2008/08/06/nb-08](http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/newsbriefs/setimes/newsbriefs/2008/08/06/nb-08) (accessed 03 December 2009).

<sup>81</sup> The SAA was ratified by the 25 member countries of the EU at that time. Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007.

<sup>82</sup> NATO Summit, 2–4 April 2008, Bucharest, Romania.

reform, and implementing reforms on property and lustration law. The “Advancing Freedom and Democracy Report” of the U.S. Department of State identifies areas where further progress and attention are required. “The government generally respects the human rights of its citizens. However, there are problems in some areas, including widespread corruption, poor prison and pretrial detention conditions, security force abuse of prisoners and detainees, and human trafficking. The government exercised measures during the year that undermined the independence of key institutions such as the judiciary, the Prosecutor’s Office, and the media.”<sup>83</sup>

Albania became a member of NATO on 1 April 2009, shortly before the Strasbourg-Kehl Summit of 3–4 April 2009. This was a significant accomplishment for Albania and a sign of its democratic maturity. However, NATO membership is only the beginning. NATO integration is a long process, which requires the continuation of democratic reforms and the strengthening of democratic institutions, thus making Albania a functioning democracy worthy of being part of the Euro-Atlantic democratic family of nations.

Despite the criticism by international organizations, as mentioned above, there is no doubt that Albania has entered a new phase of political consolidation and democratic development. While the OSCE has also helped to accelerate progress, the question arises: Is Albania at a stage that meets all OSCE commitments? Although the conduct of free and fair elections on 28 June 2009 constituted a good opportunity for Albania to leave the past behind and confirm the progress and strengthening of its democracy, reports by the international observation missions concluded that these elections were not in complete compliance with international standards. “The 28 June 2009 parliamentary elections in Albania marked tangible progress with regard to the voter registration and identification process, previously a contentious issue, and the legal framework, adopted in a consensual manner by the two main parties. These improvements were overshadowed by the politicization of technical aspects of the process by political parties and violations

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<sup>83</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, *Human Rights and Labor, Advancing Freedom and Democracy Reports, May 2009, Albania*, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/afdr/2009/eur/122889.htm>, (accessed 20 June 2009).

observed during the election campaign which undermined public confidence in the election process.”<sup>84</sup> Although these elections demonstrated that the Albanian people are capable of building a democratic society like those in other European countries, “greater efforts still need to be made by all political forces in order to meet demanding international standards.”<sup>85</sup>

The International Observation Mission appealed to the Albanian elites and political parties “to work hard in order to establish confidence among the citizens for a democratic electoral process.”<sup>86</sup> Despite observed improvements, free and fair elections in full compliance with the international standards and OSCE commitments still remain an unattained objective for Albania. This is why activities related to democratization and the development of civil society should remain the Presence’s main tasks ahead.

Building a democratic society requires cultivating a democratic culture and strengthening the institutions of democracy. In that regard, much still remains to be accomplished by Albania and its political elites. In view of the international and domestic context, it would be advantageous for the OSCE to continue to be active in Albania and to adapt its mandate, based on constructive discussions with the Albanian stakeholders, with a primary focus on those areas where further improvement is required. A number of challenges lie ahead for Albania beyond NATO membership towards EU accession, and the OSCE should continue to assist in that process.

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<sup>84</sup> International Election Observation Mission. Republic of Albania-Parliamentary Elections, 28 June 2009. Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, 1, [http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2009/06/38556\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2009/06/38556_en.pdf) (accessed 02 July 2009).

<sup>85</sup> OSCE Presence in Albania, Press Release, [http://www.osce.org/albania/item\\_1\\_38511.html](http://www.osce.org/albania/item_1_38511.html) (accessed 02 July 2009).

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

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### III. ALBANIA AND NATO

The focus of this chapter is the role of NATO in the democratization of Albania. First, it briefly outlines the major processes that led to the accession of Albania to NATO, and then discusses NATO enlargement during and after the end of the Cold War. The chapter also examines the relationship between NATO enlargement and the spread of democracy. The second part of the chapter addresses NATO's impact on democratic reforms in Albania, the reform of the Albanian Armed Forces, and challenges beyond NATO membership.

#### A. INTRODUCTION

In April 2008, the Heads of State and Government of the NATO Allies made the following statement: "Our invitation to Albania and Croatia to begin accession talks to join our Alliance marks the beginning of a new chapter for the Western Balkans and shows the way forward to a future in which a stable region is fully integrated into Euro-Atlantic institutions and able to make a major contribution to international security."<sup>87</sup> NATO's invitation to Albania to begin accession talks marked the culmination of a long relationship that dates back to shortly after the collapse of the communist regime. Among the countries of the former Eastern communist bloc, Albania was the first to apply for NATO membership. From the very beginning, Albania considered association with a highly democratic international organization, such as NATO, "an early chance to break with the vestiges of an authoritarian past."<sup>88</sup>

Since Albania joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1992, Euro-Atlantic integration has consistently been a major strategic objective of all Albanian governments and political parties. In 1994, Albania expanded its relationship with NATO by signing the Partnership for Peace Agreement, as soon as PfP emerged, as "the

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<sup>87</sup> Bucharest Summit Declaration: Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008, par. 19, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-049e.html> (accessed 17 July 2009).

<sup>88</sup> Edward D. Mansfield and Jon C. Pevehouse, "Democratization and International Organizations," *International Organization* 60, no.1 (2006): 144.

principal mechanism for forging practical security links between the Alliance and its Partners and for enhancing interoperability between Partners and NATO.”<sup>89</sup> Bilateral cooperation with NATO increased progressively, afterwards, in light of the country’s membership aspirations.

In 1995, Albania developed its first Individual Partnership Program (IPP), and in 1996 the country entered the Planning and Review Process (PARP). The declaration at the 1999 Washington NATO Summit, which confirmed the Alliance’s determination to remain “open to all European democracies, regardless of geography, willing and able to meet the responsibilities of membership, and whose inclusion would enhance overall security and stability in Europe,”<sup>90</sup> and the achievement of the Membership Action Plan (MAP) constitute significant steps for Albania on its road towards future membership in the Alliance.

Subsequently, Albania was involved in an intensified period of preparation and cooperation with NATO, a period that was successfully concluded on 1 April 2009, shortly before the Strasbourg-Kehl Summit on 3–4 April 2009, with the accession of Albania to NATO. This was not only the result of long years of hard work, during which Albania had “shown a relentless drive to complete the necessary reforms,”<sup>91</sup> but also a historic achievement for Albania on its path out of the misfortune of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the isolation it imposed on the country.

Almost 18 years after the collapse of the communist regime, Albanians would proudly confirm their return to the West. NATO accession not only constitutes a democratic milestone for Albania, it also opens perspectives for a better future for the Albanian people as part of the civilized family of nations.

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<sup>89</sup> Partnership for Peace, <http://www.nato.int/issues/pfp/index.html> (accessed 17 July 2009).

<sup>90</sup> The Washington Declaration. Signed and issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington D.C. on 23 and 24 April 1999, par. 8, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-063e.htm> (accessed 17 June 2009).

<sup>91</sup> NATO Summit, Strasbourg, France / Kehl, Germany 3–4 April 2009: Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer welcomed the Heads of State and Government of Albania and Croatia at their first NATO Summit as members of the Alliance, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news\\_52834.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_52834.htm) (accessed 17 July 2009).

## **B. NATO ENLARGEMENT DURING THE COLD WAR**

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a political-military security organization established in 1949, with the signing of the Washington Treaty, a pact that provides for political consultation, economic cooperation, and collective defense. An organization of twelve initial members (Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States) in 1949, it has since grown to 28 members through six rounds of enlargement (1952, 1955, 1982, 1999, 2004, and 2009).

The enlargement of the Alliance is an ongoing and dynamic process, which was anticipated by its author's right from the foundation of the Alliance, and which has transformed the organization greatly over the years. The basis for NATO enlargement is expressed in Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which states that "The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty."<sup>92</sup>

Three rounds of enlargement took place during the Cold War period. In 1952, Greece and Turkey joined the Alliance, thus securing stability and security in Southeastern Europe. The Federal Republic of Germany and Spain joined the Alliance respectively in 1955 and 1982. The political context, factors and conditions in which enlargement took place need to be accounted for. In 2007, Martin Erdmann, NATO's Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy, wrote, "In the context of the East-West conflict, one could argue that each additional new member was in essence a good thing. After all, within the zero-sum logic of the East-West competition, each new member meant more military clout for the Alliance vis-à-vis the Warsaw Pact."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty, Washington D.C., 4 April 1949, <http://www.nato.int/docu/basicxt/treaty.htm> (accessed 18 July 2009).

<sup>93</sup> Martin Erdmann, "NATO Enlargement-Past Present and Future," *CROSSROADS-The Macedonian Foreign Policy Journal* 3 (2007): 13.

The end of the Cold War and the change in the geo-political environment provided new opportunities to expand the Alliance in the struggle to promote a new European order. The end of the Warsaw Pact and the collapse of communism throughout Eastern Europe led these former Soviet satellites to establish new relations with the NATO member countries. In June 1991, the North Atlantic Council stated,

The long decades of European division are over. We welcome the major increase in the contacts by the Alliance and its members with the Soviet Union and the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as they accept the hand of friendship extended by Alliance Heads of States and Government in London last year. We welcome the progress made by the peoples of these countries towards political and economic reform. We seek to build constructive partnerships with them in order further to promote security and stability in a free and undivided Europe which will recognise the political, economic, social and ecological elements of security, along with the indispensable defence dimension.<sup>94</sup>

This statement was the prologue of an intense period of relations between the Alliance and Eastern European countries, which led to further rounds of enlargement in 1999, 2004 and 2009, and the admission of new members into the Alliance. In other words, to quote Martin Erdmann, “the more democracy would eventually spread throughout Europe, the more countries would be eligible to join. . . . Yet today, this logic has moved to the very center of the NATO enlargement process.”<sup>95</sup>

### **C. NATO POST-COLD WAR ENLARGEMENT—CRITERIA FOR ADMISSION**

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe changed the context of NATO enlargement, which had hardly been an issue in the last phase of the cold war. “The decision to enlarge the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) represents the most serious and complicated transformation in Europe’s security arrangements since the collapse of the Berlin Wall.”<sup>96</sup> Shortly after 1991, the countries of

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<sup>94</sup> Statement issued by the North Atlantic Council Meeting in Ministerial Session in Copenhagen, 6–7 June 1991, par. 1, <http://www.otan.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c910607d.htm> (accessed 18 July 2009).

<sup>95</sup> Martin Erdmann, “NATO Enlargement-Past Present and Future,” 11.

<sup>96</sup> Jonathan Eyal, “NATO’s Enlargement: Anatomy of a Decision,” in Anton A. Bebler, ed., *The Challenge of NATO Enlargement* (Westport, Connecticut, and London: Praeger Publishers, 1999), 22.

Central and Eastern Europe declared their intention to join the Alliance which itself was unclear about even the potential of such a seemingly radical change in the confusion of this particular year in which the Yugoslav crisis exploded, the Gulf War was fought, and the USSR collapsed. NATO membership—that is, participation in a multinational collective defense framework—would help stabilize the democratic achievements in these countries. In the words of Larry Diamond, a professor at Stanford University, “First in Southern Europe and now in Central and Eastern Europe, a powerful incentive has been the prospect of integration into the great security and economic communities of the West: NATO and the European Union. No external force will do more to secure and deepen democracy in the region than continuing integration.”<sup>97</sup>

According to Larry Diamond, this is the most compelling rationale, beyond even the need to enhance regional security, for NATO enlargement. To this end, and to respond to the changing circumstances in Europe, new institutions like the North Atlantic Cooperation Council and Partnership for Peace were developed by NATO, representing the “Alliance’s initial efforts to institutionalize cooperative relations with former adversaries and other non-NATO countries in the Euro-Atlantic region . . . . [T]he Partnership for Peace has functioned as a pathway to NATO membership for some nations.”<sup>98</sup> While taking into account the new circumstances at the end of the Cold War, the 1995 Study on NATO Enlargement concluded that “there was both a need for and a unique opportunity to build improved security in the whole of the Euro-Atlantic area, without recreating dividing lines.”<sup>99</sup>

The Study, which is a detailed public road map for governments wishing to join NATO, developed a list of criteria that aspirant countries were required to meet prior to consideration for NATO membership. In essence, these criteria were similar to the EU’s

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<sup>97</sup> Larry Diamond, “Promoting ‘Real’ Democracy,” [http://www.ppionline.org/ppi\\_ci.cfm?knlgAreaID=115&subsecID=900026&contentID=1328](http://www.ppionline.org/ppi_ci.cfm?knlgAreaID=115&subsecID=900026&contentID=1328) (accessed 19 July 2009).

<sup>98</sup> David S. Yost, *NATO Transformed* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute for Peace Press, 1998), 94.

<sup>99</sup> NATO Handbook, Chapter 3: The Opening Up of the Alliance, <http://www.nato.int/docu/handbook/2001/hb030101.htm> (accessed 19 July 2009).

Copenhagen criteria of 1993,<sup>100</sup> adapted to a NATO context. In doing so, both NATO and the EU “developed a meritocratic enlargement policy that linked EU and NATO membership credibly to democratic reform and consolidation.”<sup>101</sup> Before being invited to join the alliance, candidates must:

- have functioning democratic political systems based on a market economy;
- be committed to democratic civil-military relations and institutional structures;
- treat minorities according to OSCE standards;
- solve disputes with neighboring countries and demonstrate a commitment to solving international disputes peacefully; and
- have the ability and willingness to make a military contribution to the Alliance and to achieve interoperability with alliance members.<sup>102</sup>

The decision to undertake the enlargement of NATO to include the East European countries was made clear by U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. In February 1997, shortly before the July 1997 NATO Summit, Albright wrote that “Now the new NATO can do for Europe’s east what the old NATO did for the Europe’s west: vanquish old hatreds, promote integration, create a secure environment for prosperity, and deter violence in the region where two world wars and the cold war began.”<sup>103</sup>

The July 1997 Summit of NATO in Madrid, Spain, marked a new phase in the history of NATO, not only because of the first enlargement decisions concerning specific countries since the end of the Cold War, but also because of the commitment to the further enlargement of the Alliance. While confirming the progress achieved in the internal adaptation of the Alliance, the Heads of State and Government declared that “a

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<sup>100</sup>European Council in Copenhagen 21–22 June 1993, Conclusions of the Presidency, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/72921.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/72921.pdf) (accessed 20 July 2009).

<sup>101</sup> Frank Schimmelfennig, “European Regional Organizations, Political Conditionality, and Democratic Transformation in Eastern Europe,” *East European Politics and Societies*, 21, no. 1 (2007): 131.

<sup>102</sup> NATO Handbook, Chapter 3: The Opening Up of the Alliance, <http://www.nato.int/docu/handbook/2001/hb030101.htm> (accessed 19 July 2009).

<sup>103</sup> Madeleine K. Albright, “Enlarging NATO,” quoted in David S. Yost, *NATO Transformed* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute for Peace Press, 1998), 92.

new Europe is emerging, a Europe of greater integration and cooperation. An inclusive European security architecture is evolving to which we are contributing, along with other European organisations. Our Alliance will continue to be a driving force in this process.”<sup>104</sup> For the first time since the publication of the Study on NATO Enlargement in 1995, the Alliance extended invitations to the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to begin accession talks with NATO, a process that was formally concluded on 12 March 1999.

Furthermore, the Madrid Summit reaffirmed that NATO remains open to new members under Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty. “The Alliance expects to extend further invitations in coming years to nations willing and able to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership, and as NATO determines that the inclusion of these nations would serve the overall political and strategic interests of the Alliance and that the inclusion would enhance overall European security and stability.”<sup>105</sup> This was not only an encouragement to other aspirant countries to continue with democratic reforms in their countries, but also an assurance that enlargement was a continuing process. The Alliance expressed its commitment to extend further invitations in the coming years to nations willing and able to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership. The Prague Summit of November 2002, known as the “Transformation Summit” marked NATO’s “change from a military alliance geared for conflict against the Soviet Union to a more flexible alliance with new capabilities for new threats.”<sup>106</sup>

By this time, however, the main NATO concern had become combating international terrorism in the wake of the September 2001 terror assaults on the U.S. mainland. Although enlargement was considered a secondary issue at the Summit, NATO extended accession invitations to seven European states: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. This was the largest post-Cold War

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<sup>104</sup> Madrid Declaration on Euro-Atlantic Security and Cooperation, Issued by the Heads of State and Government, par. 1, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1997/p97-081e.htm> (accessed 19 July 2009).

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., par. 8.

<sup>106</sup> Paul Gallis, CRS Report for Congress, *The NATO Summit at Prague, 2002*, 1, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/45219.pdf> (accessed 19 July 2009).

enlargement of NATO. The Allies stated that their objective was to strengthen “security for all in the Euro-Atlantic area, and help achieve our common goal of a Europe whole and free, united in peace and by common values.”<sup>107</sup>

The most recent round of NATO enlargement was initiated at the April 2008 Summit in Bucharest, Romania, at which the Alliance extended invitations to Albania and Croatia to begin accession talks. The Alliance declared that the accession of Albania and Croatia “will enhance the Alliance's ability to face the challenges of today and tomorrow.”<sup>108</sup> It also marked, they stated, “the beginning of a new chapter for the Western Balkans and shows the way forward to a future in which a stable region is fully integrated into Euro-Atlantic institutions and able to make a major contribution to international security.”<sup>109</sup> The enlargement of NATO to the Western Balkans will also contribute to the political stabilization of southeastern Europe.

For a candidate state to be invited to join the Alliance there must be consensus among the current member governments in support of an invitation. Each candidate is considered separately by the Allies. One or more votes against a state means that it may not move to the next stage in the process of becoming a member, as happened in 1997 in the cases of Slovenia and Romania. A dispute between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, over the latter’s constitutional name, blocked its application to begin accession talks. NATO supports a resumption of the negotiations without delay and expects them to be concluded as soon as possible. Therefore, “NATO agreed that an invitation to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia will be extended as soon as a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue has been reached.”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Prague Summit Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Prague on 21 November 2002, par. 2, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2002/p02-127e.htm> (accessed 19 July 2009).

<sup>108</sup> Bucharest Summit Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008, par. 21, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-049e.html> (accessed 20 July 2009).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.



The process of NATO accession for Albania and Croatia was finalized on 1 April 2009, shortly before the Strasbourg-Kehl Summit, which marked the 60th anniversary of NATO. From an organization of 12 members in 1949, in 60 years NATO grew to 28 members.

#### **D. NATO ENLARGEMENT AND THE SPREAD OF DEMOCRACY**

The preamble of the North Atlantic Treaty provides for democracy as one of the most important principles of NATO, and indicates that democratic values will be protected through collective defense, as specified in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. “The Parties to this treaty . . . are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area.”<sup>111</sup>

The post-Cold War enlargements of NATO have provoked a debate as to whether the Alliance has contributed to democratization of European states. There are grounds to argue that NATO has contributed to democratization and continues to do so, in particular in those member states admitted after the end of the Cold War from the former communist bloc. Cooperation with NATO has affected the democratization agenda in the East European countries in the security and defense sector and beyond. Since the end of the Cold War NATO membership has been a consistent political objective of East European countries, “a prospect that has given NATO tremendous leverage over these states’ domestic and foreign policies.”<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, the new democracies sought membership in NATO as an instrument that would help these states “cement transitions to democracy.”<sup>113</sup>

Even though NATO did not sponsor an explicit democracy promotion program, through the Partnership for Peace program and the Membership Action Plan, the Alliance

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<sup>111</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty, 4 April 1949, Washington D.C., <http://www.nato.int/docu/basicxt/treaty.htm> (accessed 29 July 2009).

<sup>112</sup> Zoltan Barany, “NATO’s peaceful advance,” *Journal of Democracy*, 15, no. 1 (2004): 63.

<sup>113</sup> Edward D. Mansfield and Jon C. Pevehouse, “Democratization and International Organizations,” *International Organizations* 60, no.1 (2006): 25.

has encouraged democratic control over the armed forces and transparency of national defense decision-making and budgeting, which are essential policies in democratic consolidation, especially in countries in which power was concentrated in a party-state apparatus that collapsed quickly and with a messy legacy. Criteria put forward in the Study on NATO Enlargement require that countries aspiring to membership in NATO must adopt certain democratic standards before being considered for accession. “Although NATO by no means triumphs in all its endeavors to shape the policies of aspiring and member states, it does exercise considerable influence if it so chooses where certain domestic conditions prevail. Exploiting the political fluidity inherent in post-cold war transitions, for example, NATO cultivated transnational coalitions that supported the alliance’s democratizing, denationalizing agenda.”<sup>114</sup>

Debates over NATO enlargement and the spread of democracy followed the 1999 inclusion of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. Proponents of the idea that “NATO membership has not and will not advance democratization in Europe”<sup>115</sup> support their argument with the NATO enlargement during the Cold War, focusing on the cases of Greece, Portugal, Spain and Turkey. This argument was a backward looking one of opponents of NATO during the Cold War, but it sprang to life once more in altered circumstances after 1995. It is true that the political and security circumstances that led the Alliance to include these countries during the Cold War were significantly different from those after the Cold War. The end of the Cold War allowed the Alliance to consider giving “practical content to its long standing vision of a peaceful political order in Europe.”<sup>116</sup> Moreover, all of these countries have moved beyond their non-democratic phases of the past, and all of them, except Turkey, are currently members of the European Union.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Rachel A. Epstein, “NATO Enlargement and the Spread of Democracy: Evidence and Expectations,” *Security Studies*, 14, no. 1 (2005): 64.

<sup>115</sup> Dan Reiter, “Why NATO Enlargement Does Not Spread Democracy,” *International Security*, 14, no. 4 (2001): 42.

<sup>116</sup> David S. Yost, “The New NATO and Collective Security,” *Survival*, 40, no. 2 (1998): 35.

<sup>117</sup> Greece was officially a member of EU on 1 January 1981, Spain on 1 January 1986, and Portugal on 1 January 1986.

The post-Cold War period offers another opportunity to evaluate the question of whether NATO membership can facilitate democratization, because during this time democratization efforts have involved non-members. In the cases of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, some observers hold that NATO membership did not speed the democratization process, “because their societies and their elites were committed to democracy anyway. History reveals that these states had made long strides toward democracy even before the NATO carrot was dangled before them.”<sup>118</sup> From this point of view, these countries “chose democracy because it was the will of the majority; the ruling leaderships and publics favored membership; and the leaderships began to request entry following the installation of democratic institutions in each country.”<sup>119</sup>

The fact that the leaders of these countries pressed for membership in NATO as early as 1992 or 1993 does not necessarily mean that democracy was fully established and consolidated in these countries. The uncertain fate of security and defense institutions in these critical years also suggests that democracy and peace were not foregone conclusions in the hours after the East Germans abandoned their border fortifications in 1989. Almost all East European countries asked for NATO membership shortly after the collapse of their communist regimes. The establishment of a competitive electoral system, although important for a healthy democracy, is not enough, and “free elections are not the only measure of democracy.”<sup>120</sup> However, the three countries in question were arguably ahead of other Eastern European countries as far as democracy development is concerned. NATO and the EU began to play an important role in the transition of these countries, helping them to democratize, carry out the necessary political and economic reforms, and thus meet the membership criteria.

Democratization in these three countries has been successful, compared with the rest of the East European countries. This is why “NATO accepted those countries requiring the least assistance with their efforts to democratize. This does not nullify the

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<sup>118</sup> Dan Reiter, “Why NATO Enlargement Does Not Spread Democracy,” *International Security*, 14, no. 4 (2001): 64.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Rachel A. Epstein, “NATO Enlargement and the Spread of Democracy: Evidence and Expectations,” *Security Studies*, 14, no. 1 (2005): 66.

argument, however, that through the MAPs the alliance has helped promote democracy and accelerate economic reform in those countries not accepted in the first round of enlargement. MAPs provide a 'road map' to aid those countries not accepted in preparing for future membership."<sup>121</sup> The national and international contexts in which democracy is being developed in the East European countries, especially in the Baltic countries, need to be accounted for. "They are very new democracies, with little experience in democratic government, and face serious economic, social and political problems. Indeed, for some the failure to achieve NATO membership may itself be a source of destabilization, because they think that membership in Western organizations might help them resist the Russians. These states want all the insurance they can get."<sup>122</sup>

In his address to the North Atlantic Council at the January 1994 Brussels Summit, President Bill Clinton stated that, "If democracy in the East falls, then violence and disruption from the East will once again harm us and other democracies."<sup>123</sup> It is hard to prove that NATO enlargement will not enhance democratization by citing examples of military coups in Greece and Turkey during the 1960s and the reversions to autocracy that these countries experienced. "NATO has never sanctioned, much less ejected, a state for domestic political changes."<sup>124</sup>

Democracy development received special vigor and became a strong driving force in Eastern Europe in the 1990s, and the general impetus toward democratization has been sustained in this region. However, the trajectory of democratic development has not been the same everywhere, and NATO influence on the reform process has been different in each country. This is why "East European states should be distinguished according to

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<sup>121</sup> Dessie Zagorcheva, "Correspondence: NATO and Democracy," *International Security*, 26, no. 3 (2002): 221–235.

<sup>122</sup> Harvey Waterman, "Correspondence: NATO and Democracy," *International Security*, 26, no. 3 (2002): 221–235.

<sup>123</sup> Partnership for Peace: building a new security for the 21st century — President Clinton, North Atlantic Council, Brussels, Belgium, January 10, 1994, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1584/is\\_nSUPP-1\\_v5/ai\\_15184065/?tag=content;coll](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1584/is_nSUPP-1_v5/ai_15184065/?tag=content;coll) (accessed 22 July 2009).

<sup>124</sup> Dan Reiter, "Why NATO Enlargement Does Not Spread Democracy," *International Security*, 14, no. 4 (2001): 59.

their level of democratization.”<sup>125</sup> In the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia, democratization has arguably been more successful than in Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and other countries that joined NATO in later rounds of enlargement. “Countries with no democratic traditions before the fall of communism need greater guidance from international institutions than do those that are more democratically advanced.”<sup>126</sup> This is why NATO MAPs have been of great importance for Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYROM and Romania. These countries had almost no experience with democracy prior to 1990.

Although the argument that EU membership would better serve democratic reforms is correct, these countries decided to apply for NATO membership “when they realized that joining the EU would not be possible in the near future.”<sup>127</sup> This is the reason why almost all East European countries “focused their early post communist efforts on satisfying NATO’s less rigorous membership criteria.”<sup>128</sup> Because of their lack of democratic experiences, democracy consolidation in these countries requires a long time; and “insofar as democratic consolidation depends on the stability afforded by robust security arrangements full membership in the Atlantic Alliance is actually, from the perspective of democracy, a more important objective than EU integration.”<sup>129</sup>

With the exceptions of Albania and Croatia, which joined NATO in 2009, all the countries that have joined the Alliance since the end of the Cold War are now members of the EU. This fact is an indication of the power of NATO incentives and of the Alliance’s contribution to democratization in these countries. What NATO has helped accomplish in these countries has its origin in the years following the end of the Cold War, when NATO based its transformation on liberal principles, primarily driven by the United States, with a view to NATO’s enlargement eastward. Two of the most important NATO programs after the Cold War, PfP and MAP, not only embedded the democratic

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<sup>125</sup> Dessie Zagorcheva, “Correspondence: NATO and Democracy,” *International Security*, 26, no. 3 (2002): 221–235.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Dessie Zagorcheva, “Correspondence: NATO and Democracy,” 221–235.

<sup>128</sup> Zoltan Barany, “NATO’s peaceful advance,” *Journal of Democracy*, 15, no. 1(2004): 63.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

requirements and criteria necessary for future membership, but also “strengthened NATO democratic governance identity by requiring the new NATO member states to comply with the provisions on civil-military relations and the democratic control of the armed forces.”<sup>130</sup> More than 20 years after the collapse of communism, there is no doubt that today Eastern Europe is more democratic than at any time in its history, and in that regard, “NATO enlargement has been a major element of Europe’s democratic consolidation.”<sup>131</sup>

Since early 1990, increasingly “shared liberal democratic values and norms are at the heart of NATO’s legitimacy.”<sup>132</sup> The Alliance has dedicated significant efforts to democratization and defining security as closely linked to democracy. The common Atlantic democratic values, as expressed by the authors of the Washington Treaty of 1949, “are as constant today as they were when the alliance was created.”<sup>133</sup>

Post-Cold War NATO enlargements, security documents and practices “expose a growing link between security and development of democracy.”<sup>134</sup> Liberal democratic values and norms have always been recognized as standards of paramount importance for the existence and functioning of the transatlantic security community. The desire to be part of the Euro-Atlantic security community, translated into the pursuit of membership in NATO and/or the EU, has been a strong driving force supporting democratic development in all Eastern European countries.

## **E. ALBANIA’S INITIAL STEPS ON THE ROAD TO NATO MEMBERSHIP**

The elections of March 1992 marked a break with the communist past in Albania. The opposition won a landslide victory, which surpassed even the most optimistic

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<sup>130</sup> Fred Tanner, “NATO’s role in Defense Cooperation and Democratization,” [http://www.gcsp.ch/e/publications/Issues\\_Institutions/Int\\_Organisations/Academic\\_Articles/Tanner-IntlSpectator-2004.pdf](http://www.gcsp.ch/e/publications/Issues_Institutions/Int_Organisations/Academic_Articles/Tanner-IntlSpectator-2004.pdf) (accessed 22 July 2009).

<sup>131</sup> Martin Erdmann, “NATO Enlargement-Past Present and Future,” 16. (accessed 22 July 2009).

<sup>132</sup> Fred Tanner, “NATO’s role in Defense Cooperation and Democratization.”

<sup>133</sup> Donald Abenheim, “The Big Bang of NATO Enlargement: Gotterdammerung or Rebirth?” *Strategic Insights*, II, no. 2 (2003).

<sup>134</sup> Sonia Lucarelli, “Peace and Democracy: The rediscovered link. The EU, NATO and the European System of Liberal-Democratic Security Communities,” <http://www.otan.nato.int/acad/fellow/00-02/Lucarelli's.pdf> (accessed 22 July 2009).

predictions. As Elez Biberaj has observed, “the post communist government was faced with formidable challenges in reforming the military and restoring civilian control over the armed forces.”<sup>135</sup> For the first time, a civilian with no previous military experience was appointed Minister of Defense. Radical reforms were required to create a professional and depoliticized army.

On 6 June 1992, shortly after the first democratic government was established, Albania was accepted as a member of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC). The NACC “represented NATO’s first attempt to go beyond ‘military contacts’ and ‘regular diplomatic liaison’ with the states of the Warsaw Pact (a treaty that was formally disbanded in July 1991) and to develop—in the words of the November 1991 Rome Declaration—‘a more institutional relationship of consultation and cooperation on political and security issues.’”<sup>136</sup> The NACC was composed of the sixteen NATO countries and twenty other states, all former Warsaw Pact states or former Soviet republics, and in its procedures and method of operation was “no different from the OSCE: a gigantic talking shop.”<sup>137</sup>

The NACC marked the beginning of institutionalized cooperation between Albania and NATO at time in which no consensus existed on the enlargement of the Alliance, but the need to address the security vacuum in central and Eastern Europe grew more intense. Exchange visits of senior Albanian officials and military officers at NATO headquarters in Brussels and NATO senior officials in Albania helped increase the public’s knowledge and understanding of the alliance. They culminated with the visit of NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner, the first ever by a NATO Secretary General, in March 1993. In his address to the Albanian Parliament, Wörner said that the purpose of his visit was “to extend the hand of cooperation to Albania... and to discuss what we can do together to deepen our cooperation and make it as relevant as possible to your

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<sup>135</sup> Elez Biberaj, 152.

<sup>136</sup> David S. Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 94.

<sup>137</sup> Anton A. Bebler, ed., *The Challenge of NATO Enlargement* (Praeger Westport, Connecticut, London, 1999), 24.

concerns."<sup>138</sup> Wörner emphasized that the Alliance was prepared to assist the country "to build modern armed forces that can not only preserve your [Albania's] independence but also be our partners in upholding cooperative security in Europe."<sup>139</sup>

Albania occupies a strategic location in southeastern Europe, and as "war raged across the former Yugoslavia, Albania's importance to NATO grew steadily."<sup>140</sup> In that regard, Albania's membership in the NACC and later in Partnership for Peace helped establish parameters of defense reform from an early stage. A genuine domestic political consensus and strong public support for closer relations with NATO have been instrumental in the success of these reforms, "which can not be understood without taking into account the crucial role of NATO."<sup>141</sup>

## **F. PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE**

The launching of the Partnership for Peace initiative at the January 1994 Brussels Summit proved to be a major political step by NATO. The Framework Document states that

This Partnership is established as an expression of a joint conviction that stability and security in the Euro-Atlantic area can be achieved only through cooperation and common action. Protection and promotion of fundamental freedoms and human rights, and safeguarding of freedom, justice, and peace through democracy are shared values fundamental to the Partnership. In joining the Partnership, the member States of the North Atlantic Alliance and the other States subscribing to this Document recall that they are committed to the preservation of democratic societies, their freedom from coercion and intimidation, and the maintenance of the principles of international law.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> NATO Secretary General addresses Albanian Parliament, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news\\_24105.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_24105.htm?selectedLocale=en) (accessed 24 July 2009).

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ryan C. Hendrickson, "Albania and NATO, Regional Security and Selective Intervention," *Security Dialogue* 30, no.1 (1999): 109-116.

<sup>141</sup> Erika Abazi, "Defense Reform of the Albanian Armed Forces: Democratization and Transformation," [http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/co/co\\_sep04/co\\_sep04c.pdf](http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/co/co_sep04/co_sep04c.pdf) (accessed 25 July 2009).

<sup>142</sup> Partnership for Peace: Framework Document Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council Brussels 10–11 January 1994, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-18F3A61D-320F226/natolive/official\\_texts\\_24469.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-18F3A61D-320F226/natolive/official_texts_24469.htm?selectedLocale=en) (accessed 16 November 2009).



PfP was designed to increase confidence and to promote cooperative efforts to reinforce security. It offered Albania not only a true possibility of strengthening its relations with NATO, in accordance with its own specific interests and capabilities, but it also turned out to be a key element of the country's process of integration into the alliance. Albania joined the PfP, which soon became "a pan-European security institution with greater military and political content than the OSCE,"<sup>143</sup> on 23 February 1994. By signing the PfP Framework Document, Albania strongly confirmed its interest in close cooperation with NATO. Albanian policy-makers judged that the security, integrity and protection of the country's democratic achievements and national interests could best be guaranteed through cooperation and integration with NATO as a security organization. "Viewed from an Albanian perspective, PfP is not simply an initiative to bring Eastern European armies more in line with those of NATO or merely a program to coordinate activities. It is first of all, an ambitious initiative intended to enhance stability and security globally, in Europe, and regionally in the Balkans and Mediterranean."<sup>144</sup> Albania did not intend to be merely a passive bystander, but rather an active participant. In that regard, PfP increasingly served as a new and appropriate institution through which Albania could not only deepen and intensify its ties with the alliance, primarily in the security area, but also facilitate the transmission of NATO practices to Albania as a partner.

In the Albanian context, PfP gained a wider and more political dimension by including the promotion of democratic principles. This is why PfP was strongly supported by the entire Albanian political spectrum. However, the Albanian government was aware that the pursuit of NATO membership constituted a much more complicated and long-term process, which definitely required high standards for democratic society and government and free market economic development. By signing the PfP agreements and engaging in active participation, Albania demonstrated its strong intention and commitment to become a NATO member in the future. Hence for the Albanian elite, it

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<sup>143</sup> David S. Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 98.

<sup>144</sup> Partnership for Peace and new dimensions of Albania's security posture, Commentary by John Sray, <http://fms.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/albania2.htm> (accessed 25 July 2009).

was clear that “participation advances a perception of a common purpose among other partners, which tends to facilitate their cooperation both within NATO and among themselves.”<sup>145</sup>

During the period leading to accession, Albania was not only a security consumer, but also a security provider. It was involved in Alliance activities and contributed to NATO-led operations in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Iraq. Albania played an important role in supporting Allied efforts in 1999 to end the humanitarian tragedy in Kosovo and secure the peace after the air campaign. Albania has also hosted and participated in a range of PfP exercises and activities, and contributes to the fight against terrorism through its participation in the Partnership Action Plan on Terrorism. This includes sharing intelligence and analysis with NATO, enhancing national counter-terrorist capabilities, and improving border security. Furthermore, a considerable number of Albanian military officers and civilian officials have received training and education at the NATO Defense College in Rome, the NATO School in Oberammergau, and in the United States and other NATO countries.

Albania’s cooperation with NATO was an outstanding case of successful PfP activity, which “in the case of Albania has broken new ground in the evolution of PfP and has confirmed its position as a key element in the new European security structure.”<sup>146</sup> The increased cooperation between Albania and NATO, both in the military and political areas, especially after 1999, shows the socialization impact of the PfP initiative, which proved to be a useful NATO mechanism in influencing military reform and promoting democracy in Albania.

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<sup>145</sup> Emilian Kavalski, *Extending the European Security Community Constructing Peace in the Balkans*, 162.

<sup>146</sup> George Katsirdakis, Albania: A case study in the practical implementation of Partnership for Peace, *NATO Review*, Web edition, 46, No. 2 (1998): 22–26, <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/1998/9802-07.htm> (accessed 26 July 2009).

## **G. DEMOCRATIC REFORM OF THE ALBANIAN ARMED FORCES – THE ROLE OF NATO**

The overall transformation of Albanian society, which followed immediately after the establishment of a democratic political system, required a restructuring of the Albanian Armed Forces along more accountable, efficient and sustainable lines. The immediate objective was de-politicization of the armed forces and the establishment of democratic civilian control, as a fundamental aspect of democracy development, based on “institutional mechanisms, oversight, and professional norms.”<sup>147</sup> As the military was deeply penetrated by the communist party, de-politicization of the army was the main challenge of the reform. Given the long communist legacy of the country, democratizing the armed forces in Albania would necessitate:

- that multiple channels of civilian control and oversight be established;
- that civilians in positions of authority over the military be democratically accountable; and
- that large segments of the military-security apparatus, which had previously been the exclusive domain of military authority, be significantly civilianized.

Steps taken thereafter included the appointment of a civilian defense minister to whom the General Staff answers, the establishment of a civilianized ministry of defense, the creation of a parliamentary defense committee that exercises political oversight, and the definition of a transparent defense budget. In light of NATO requirements, the reform of the Albanian armed forces sought “a system of checks and balances in which the executive, government, parliament and society (through the media and NGOs) all shared in oversight,”<sup>148</sup> a system that had hardly ever been imagined or considered before in Albania.

Reform of the armed forces was necessary not only to accommodate the new security policy and defense doctrine, but also to respond to the changing security

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<sup>147</sup> Thomas C. Bruneau and Florina Cristiana, “Towards a New Conceptualization of Democratization and Civil-Military Relations,” *Democratization* 15, no. 5 (2008): 909–929.

<sup>148</sup> Rachel Epstein, “International Institutions and the Democratization of Central and East European Civil-Military Relations,” <http://www.unc.edu/euce/eusa2007/papers/epstein-r-06d.pdf> (accessed 20 November 2009).

requirements at the national and international levels. “Meeting NATO standards for defense capability was potentially a force for both democratic reform and military modernization in Albania.”<sup>149</sup> Wide public support and enthusiasm for NATO, particularly after 1999, proved to be a significant motive for defense reforms. In practical terms “almost all changes within the Albanian Armed Forces are the result of the goal of NATO membership.”<sup>150</sup> The Albanian elites sought NATO membership not only as the best security guarantee, but also as a cultural choice, and an outstanding accomplishment in “returning to Europe,” the motto of the Albanian people since the collapse of the communist regime in late 1990.

The reform process included three main components as emerged in the process of the general political transition in Europe especially as it applied to the security sector and political culture in Albania: legal, procedural and conceptual, and professional.

### **1. Legal Framework**

To ensure democratic and civilian control of the armed forces, the Albanian constitution provides for the main dispositions that regulate civil-military relations and responsibilities in times of war and peace. The Parliament is the main institution responsible for the control of the military and its structures. It approves the strategic documents on national security and defense policy. The parliamentary defense committee is the principal instrument through which the Parliament exercises democratic control over the armed forces. It is an instrument that oversees the implementation of the defense budget, checks and assesses the efficacy of the existing laws, and recommends amendments as required.

The President of the Republic is the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. In peace time, the President exercises his authority over the armed forces through the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense, while in wartime, he leads the armed forces

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<sup>149</sup> Bonn International Center for Conversion, “Brief 34 Defense Reform and Conversion in Albania, Macedonia and Croatia,” [http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/country/eu\\_pdf/europe-alb-cro-mac-2006.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/country/eu_pdf/europe-alb-cro-mac-2006.pdf) (accessed 21 November 2009).

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

through the Commander of the armed forces. Upon the proposal of the Prime Minister, the President appoints and dismisses the Chief of the General Staff.

The Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers prepare and propose the legal framework, the budget, and the main documents on defense policy. The Minister of Defense, a civilian by the constitution, represents the highest official, in peacetime, of all military and civilian personnel of the armed forces. He is responsible to the Parliament, the President, and the Prime Minister for implementing the defense policy.

The Chief of the General Staff is appointed for a three-year term. In his daily work, the Chief of Staff cooperates with the Minister of Defense, while in wartime he is the Commander of the Armed Forces. He is responsible to the President, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Defense, an arrangement that provides for the neutrality of the post.

## **2. Procedures and Concepts**

This component of the reform included the establishment of arrangements for the smooth functioning of the military, the exercise of democratic and civilian control, the streamlining of respective responsibilities and competences, and the organization of command and control mechanisms, all of which were aimed at improving the efficiency and accountability of the army. As part of this process, military ranks, which were abolished during the communist regime, were introduced and implemented as a significant step towards the establishment of a professional and modern army.

Publication of the 2002, 2005 and 2007 National Military Strategies constituted a new approach for Albania in the post-communist era, and each of them indicates the significant changes Albania has undergone. The military strategies have been oriented towards the accomplishment of on-going initiatives targeted at NATO membership. Their publication has served to increase transparency and accountability in the security and defense sector and has been intended to inform the public of the activity of the Armed Forces. Albania's accession to NATO requires a review of the National Military Strategy in order to better respond to the new circumstances and challenges that Albania faces as a member of the Alliance.

### 3. Professional Component

The restructuring of the Albanian Armed Forces (AAF) required the transformation of military capabilities, including the complete or partial closure of garrisons and the relocation of units. Personnel, infrastructure, and equipment must be capable of meeting contemporary challenges. The main objectives included the reduction and right-sizing of the armed forces, increasing operational capabilities, and modernization. The aim of the AAF restructuring, which is planned to be completed by 2010, “is to achieve a smaller but more capable force with appropriate financial resources.”<sup>151</sup> Increased professionalism of the armed forces occupies a central place in the long-term development plan of the AAF. In the process of transformation, “the presence of NATO has provided much-needed orientation and a road map to follow, together with the financial aid that is indispensable for Albania to reach the necessary standards for joining the North Atlantic Alliance.”<sup>152</sup>

The plan put forward by the Albanian government in 2000 included two stages: first, to transform the AAF into a smaller but more efficient force between 2000 and 2004, and second, to modernize them between 2005 and 2009. In 2002, Albania launched a ten-year defense reform strategy that was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Defense “in order to trim down and thoroughly modernize the AAF.”<sup>153</sup> During the past 17 years, the AAF has undergone a long and difficult downsizing and transformation process. The decision to focus AAF efforts on NATO membership, an environment of new threats, and contributions to U.S. and NATO-led operations in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Iraq led to a radical evolution of the force structure and defense mindset within the AAF. The AAF has made significant strides towards the transformation from an internally focused territorial defense organization into a modern, flexible, and agile force

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<sup>151</sup> Bonn International Center for Conversion, “Brief 34 Defense Reform and Conversion in Albania, Macedonia and Croatia,” 10, [http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/country/eu\\_pdf/europe-alb-cro-mac-2006.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/country/eu_pdf/europe-alb-cro-mac-2006.pdf) (accessed 21 November 2009).

<sup>152</sup> Erika Abazi, “Defense Reform of the Albanian Armed Forces: Democratization and Transformation,” [http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/co/co\\_sep04/co\\_sep04c.pdf](http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/co/co_sep04/co_sep04c.pdf) (accessed 25 July 2009).

<sup>153</sup> Institute of International and Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2004-2005*, quoted in Bonn International Center for Conversion, “Brief 34 Defense Reform and Conversion in Albania, Macedonia and Croatia,” 10, [http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/country/eu\\_pdf/europe-alb-cro-mac-2006.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/country/eu_pdf/europe-alb-cro-mac-2006.pdf), (accessed 21 November 2009).

that can perform effectively in a national defense role as well as part of a deployed multinational contingent. However, transformation is an ongoing process. To that end,

The Albanian Armed Forces are currently undergoing an extensive defense reform process, which consists in the transformation of the strategic concept, doctrine, organizational structure, personnel management, military infrastructure, training and education, the transformation of the systems and equipments as well as that of many other elements. This is an analytical and continuous process based on the constant assessment of the security environment and lessons learned, and associated with the related reflections in the interest of a better execution of the AAF mission.<sup>154</sup>

The alliance has inspired many positive changes in Albanian defense institutions. NATO incentives have helped the democratization of the country, “a process through which institutions, practices, and norms are transmitted between international actors.”<sup>155</sup>

## **H. MEMBERSHIP ACTION PLAN**

NATO's Washington Summit, in April 1999, introduced the Membership Action Plan (MAP), in part to convince the aspirant countries that Article 10 and the Open Door policy were genuine and to assist the aspirants in developing forces and capabilities that could operate with NATO under its new Operational Capabilities Concept (OCC). Although the 1995 Study on NATO Enlargement identified the main criteria for admission, MAP went further in defining what an aspirant country needed to accomplish on the path to membership.

While the Membership Action Plan “does not replace the Partnership for Peace (Pfp) programme,”<sup>156</sup> as a NATO program of advice, assistance and practical support tailored to the individual needs of the country, MAP was an instrument for assessing the

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<sup>154</sup> Ministry of Defense and General Staff of Armed Forces, *AAF Long Term Development Plan: Strategic Vision 2020*, 4.

<sup>155</sup> Emilian Kavalski, *Extending the European Security Community Constructing Peace in the Balkans*, 65.

<sup>156</sup> NATO Handbook, Chapter 3: The Opening Up of the Alliance, The Process of NATO Enlargement, The Membership Action Plan, <http://www.nato.int/docu/handbook/2001/hb030103.htm> (accessed 24 July 2009).

progress made by Albania towards full NATO membership. As an aspirant country, Albania was expected to carry out significant reforms in political and economic fields, defense and military issues, resources, security issues and legal aspects. Although “participation in the MAP does not guarantee future membership,”<sup>157</sup> it de facto put Albania on track to join the Western military alliance. It was considered both a vehicle and an intermediary stage toward NATO membership. The object of MAP was to direct Albania to do those things that are going to be essential if it wants to be an effective ally, “that is producers, and not just consumers of security.”<sup>158</sup> The implementation of the NATO Membership Action Plan accelerated and focused the development of the defense structures of Albania. With the establishment of a national legal and strategic framework, military reform has been guided primarily by external actors and through the mechanisms of MAP, making it, therefore, a project of national and international importance.

The country joined the MAP initiative in 1999, and became a NATO member in April 2009. In contrast to other MAP partners, Albania experienced strong public support for NATO, particularly after the Kosovo conflict. However, it took almost ten years for Albania to complete the reforms necessary for membership, and to demonstrate that it is able to further the principles of the 1949 Washington Treaty and contribute to the promotion of security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area.

Immediately after receiving MAP status, Albania regulated its activities by focusing on targets and priorities of the plan. A good example is the signing of the Adriatic Partnership Charter (or A3) by Albania and two of its neighbors, Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in May 2003. This initiative “is an indication of the shared vision for peace and stability in Southeast Europe.”<sup>159</sup> At the same time, it promoted cooperation that progressively led these countries closer to Euro-Atlantic structures, with accession to NATO as their final goal.

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<sup>157</sup>NATO Handbook, Chapter 3: The Opening Up of the Alliance, The Process of NATO Enlargement, The Membership Action Plan, <http://www.nato.int/docu/handbook/2001/hb030103.htm> (accessed 24 July 2009).

<sup>158</sup> Robert Hunter, Former U.S. ambassador to NATO, quoted in “NATO: What is a Membership Action Plan,” Radio Free Europe Radio Free Liberty, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1079718.html> (accessed 28 July 2009).

<sup>159</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania, <http://www.mfa.gov.al> (accessed 20 November 2009).



Since 1999, MAP “has provided an effective new framework through which NATO has been able to motivate further reforms . . . and to offer guidance for the identification of priorities in allocating scarce resources. In these and many other instances, the causal links between incentives created by NATO and domestic policy changes are clear.”<sup>160</sup> MAP enabled NATO to make the evaluation process more structured and rigorous, thereby “keeping the readiness of each aspirant for membership under review,”<sup>161</sup> maintaining the leverage mechanism over Albania as an aspirant country, “inducing positive changes in specific policy areas,”<sup>162</sup> and thus making a significant contribution to the democratization of the country. The perspective of NATO membership provided for “positive incentives for democratization.”<sup>163</sup> In that regard, the accomplishment of the reforms anticipated in MAP had a strong pro-democratic effect and established the fundamental basis for the consolidation of democracy in Albania.

MAP was not simply an activity involving only military and security issues. In addition to defense and military issues, restructuring and modernization of the Armed Forces, and implementation of Partnership Goals, the reforms carried out during the MAP cycle included political and economic areas, judicial matters, public administration and service, and the conduct of elections in compliance with international standards. NATO support has enabled Albania “to make good progress in its fight against corruption, organized crime, trafficking and terrorism, and to advance its political, judicial and economic reform programs.”<sup>164</sup>

The processes of reform and adjustment on the road to NATO membership had an important impact on building democratic institutions in Albania, thus making membership in the Alliance the final confirmation of its democratic legitimacy and the validation of its stable democracy, free market and dynamic civil society.

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<sup>160</sup> Zoltan Barany, “NATO’s Peaceful Advance,” 75.

<sup>161</sup> Istanbul Summit Communiqué, Issued by the Heads of State and government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council, <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2004/s040628f.htm> (accessed 22 November 2009).

<sup>162</sup> Zoltan Barany, “NATO’s Peaceful Advance,” 75.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>164</sup> Lulzim Basha, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania, “The Albanian Perspective of the A3 Approach to NATO,” *CROSSROADS-The Macedonian Foreign Policy Journal* 3 (2007): 28.

## I. CHALLENGES BEYOND NATO MEMBERSHIP

Gaining NATO membership has been the most important achievement of post-communist Albania, and a significant indication of the democratic development of the country. Although Albania is a new democracy, NATO membership is a model that inspires continuous economic and political development. However, democratization is a continuing process, and as such it never ends. It takes time because it requires not only the establishment of new institutions, but also widespread trust in them, which almost never develops quickly. In the new circumstances, international socialization is a complex process of transferring values, norms and standards of policy formulation. It is a process “which does not end with membership, but carries on inside the organization as well.”<sup>165</sup>

To understand the socialization power of NATO, it is important to consider the two aspects of socialization, “compliance (socialization by international organisations) and learning to comply (socialization in international organisations).”<sup>166</sup> Albania’s accession to NATO marks the end of the “compliance” aspect. However, the second aspect has growing importance for Albania, particularly as the country is preparing for potential membership in the European Union. While membership in the Alliance is the conclusion of a long relationship, integration into the Alliance is a much longer process related to “the development of the national capabilities in the political, economic, military, financial, legal and information security areas. Development of these capabilities takes normally longer than the date of membership in the Alliance, implying both the contributions to and the benefits from the collective security of a member country. Such things are not supposed to be met at the first day of membership in the Alliance.”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Emilian Kavalski, *Extending the European Security Community Constructing Peace in the Balkans*, 163.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>167</sup> Col. Thimi Hudhra, Chief of Defense Analysis Center, Ministry of Defense of Albania, “Towards full membership into NATO and beyond,” published by the Atlantic Council of Albania, <http://atlantic-council-al.com> (accessed 20 November 2009).

In other words, as a NATO member, Albania faces the challenge of carrying out its obligations by constructing the required framework for their practical implementation. Although Albania is a small country, these challenges take on special importance for it as NATO is reinventing itself in the changing global security circumstances and developing its new Strategic Concept,<sup>168</sup> a process that “calls for an inclusive and participatory approach from the biggest to the smallest Ally.”<sup>169</sup> From the military perspective, integration requires the completion of the transformation of the Albanian Armed Forces pursuant to NATO’s “nine pillars” DOTMELPFI concept: doctrine development (D), organization structure (O), training and exercises (T), material modernization (M), education system (E), leadership development (L), personnel management (P), facilities development (F), and interoperability of declared military units with other NATO countries (I).

As a new ally, Albania is expected to “integrate into the NATO collective defence planning process, taking in the national responsibilities of contribution with military forces, sharing also the budget, the military personnel, infrastructure and other resources.”<sup>170</sup> Although the Albanian Armed Forces have done a lot to comply with NATO requirements, the challenges ahead require a focus on the quality of their transformation, and increased “capabilities for effective participation in the Alliance.”<sup>171</sup> From a political perspective, the accession of Albania to NATO is an indication of “international recognition of a country's democratic credentials.”<sup>172</sup> While the country

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<sup>168</sup> At their Summit in Strasbourg / Kehl on 3 and 4 April 2009, NATO’s Heads of State and Government tasked the Secretary General to develop a new NATO Strategic Concept. This exercise should be completed by the time of NATO’s next Summit, which is expected to take place towards the end of 2010.

<sup>169</sup> NATO’s New Strategic Concept, <http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/roadmap-strategic-concept.html#guiding>, (accessed 20 November 2009).

<sup>170</sup> Col. Thimi Hudhra, “Towards Full Membership into NATO and Beyond.”

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Heinrich Klebes, “The Quest for Democratic Security: The Role of the Council of Europe and U.S. Foreign Policy,” Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace. Quoted in Edward D. Mansfield and Jon C. Pevehouse, “Democratization and International Organizations,” *International Organization* 60, no.1 (2006): 144.

has already applied for candidate status with the EU, being a member of NATO will help Albania as a democratizing state and lead to greater stability in the Balkan region and beyond.

NATO membership bears importance not only at the national level by providing “an important signal to mass publics and a key means to lock in democratic institutions,”<sup>173</sup> but also at the international level by sending “a credible signal to international audiences to follow through on political reform.”<sup>174</sup> Only through its continuous commitment to further political and economic reforms will Albania gain the credibility required for the accomplishment of its next major goal: EU membership.

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<sup>173</sup> Edward D. Mansfield and Jon C. Pevehouse, “Democratization and International Organizations,” *International Organization* 60, no.1 (2006): 8.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

## IV. ALBANIA AND THE EU

This chapter examines the role of the European Union in the process of democratization in Albania and its impact on shaping the country's domestic political development. It first addresses EU conditionality in the context of the political transition in Central and Eastern European countries. It then focuses on how the instrument of conditionality has worked in the case of Albania and Albanian political elites' reactions to this strategy. It also examines the two main instruments used as conditionality levers: aid and technical assistance, and progress in access negotiations, and it explores how the Albanian elites have responded to EU membership incentives.

### A. INTRODUCTION

Like NATO, the European Union has been an important external driver of political change in Albania. As in other Eastern European countries, the prospect of the EU membership has been a powerful instrument, encouraging major economic and political reforms and affecting the functioning of domestic institutions. It has also been “a powerful factor in shaping the internal and external policies pursued by political actors.”<sup>175</sup> Particularly since 2000, Albania has made real progress in building democratic institutions, improving economic performance, and promoting regional cooperation. In a speech to the European Affairs Committee of the German Bundestag in 2004, Chris Patten, then the Commissioner for External Relations, stated: “In many ways the people of Albania suffered more than any other during the period of communist rule. . . . Freedom of expression and independence of thought were so completely crushed that it has been very hard to create a stable and democratic country out of this awful inheritance. . . . The perspective of membership is very clear and as Europeans we want to see the Albanian people move forward in this process.”<sup>176</sup> Albania got rid of the totalitarian

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<sup>175</sup> Grzegorz Ekiert, Dilemmas of Europeanization: Eastern and Central Europe after the EU Enlargement, 2, <http://src-home.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/publicn/acta/25/ekiert.pdf> (accessed 6 January 2010).

<sup>176</sup> Chris Patten, The Western Balkan: The Road to Europe, Speech to German Bundestag European Affairs Committee, [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/ear/publications/main/pub-speech\\_berlin\\_20040428.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/ear/publications/main/pub-speech_berlin_20040428.htm) (accessed 6 January 2010).

communist regime in late 1990. However, as Geoffrey Pridham argues, “democracy is not born of an immaculate conception, but inherits a variety of past legacies that may complicate the regime change.”<sup>177</sup> In that regard, subsequent events illustrated the impact of past legacies in the democratization process of the country. For Albania, with a hard and long communist past, the EU, in other words the “return to Europe,” was a grand political project not only associated with the democratic stability and economic prosperity of Western Europe, but also with the democracy, security, and human rights that Albanian society had long desired. This political project also derives “from a strong identification with Western values and norms as well as with the Western European international community,”<sup>178</sup> from which Albania had been cut off for forty-five years under communist rule.

While EU enlargement is considered perhaps the most effective foreign policy tool of the European Union, the process of qualifying to join the EU offers Albania a prospect of stability, democracy, and further economic development. It has provided powerful incentives that have shaped the political agenda of the Albanian elites. However, the way in which the Albanian elites have responded to the incentives of EU membership, how well they have reflected the preference of Albanian society for EU membership, remains an issue for discussion. It is “perhaps one of the most debated matters in the national public and political discourse.”<sup>179</sup>

Although EU-Albania relations started as early as 1991, when the country was included in the EU PHARE assistance program,<sup>180</sup> it was only in 2006 that the country concluded a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), and thereby established a new contractual relationship with the EU in an advanced stage towards membership. The

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<sup>177</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *The dynamics of democratization: a comparative approach* (London and NY: Continuum, 2000), 30.

<sup>178</sup> Frank Schimmelfennig, *The EU, NATO and the Integration of Europe Rules and Rhetoric* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 90.

<sup>179</sup> Gjergji Vurmo, Relations of Albania with EU, 4, [http://web.ceu.hu/cens/assets/files/publications/Albania\\_EU](http://web.ceu.hu/cens/assets/files/publications/Albania_EU) (accessed 7 January 2010).

<sup>180</sup> The Phare programme was originally created in 1989 to assist Poland and Hungary (The acronym PHARE stands for Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies.) Until 2000, three countries of the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) were also beneficiaries of Phare.

primary objective of the SAA, which entered into force on 1 April 2009, was to support the consolidation of democracy, the rule of law, economic development and regional cooperation. Hence, the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) is intended to help Albania build the required capacities “to adopt and implement EU law, as well as European and international standards.”<sup>181</sup> The SAP opens a concrete accession perspective, and remains the framework for Albania’s European Union course, all the way to its future accession. The European Union’s conditions for enlargement provide that “any European country which respects the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law may apply to become a member of the Union.”<sup>182</sup> As with other Central and Eastern European countries, the success of democratic reforms in Albania is a prerequisite for joining the European Union.

On 28 April 2009, shortly after Albania became a member of NATO, the Albanian government applied for the status of candidate with the EU. As a political decision, it sought to take advantage of the new status the country enjoyed as a NATO member. The application would also have a domestic impact with elections to the National Assembly scheduled for 28 June of the same year. At the end of 2009, the European Commission presented Albania with a questionnaire to assess the country’s application to join the EU. “The questions relate to all segments of the European legal framework and the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership. The questionnaire attaches particular importance to the political criteria. Good governance, the rule of law, judiciary reform, the fight against corruption, media freedom—these are all key issues which will form the core of our assessment.”<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> European Commission-Enlargement-The Stabilisation and Association Agreement, [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement\\_process/accession\\_process/how\\_does\\_a\\_country\\_join\\_the\\_eu/sap/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accession_process/how_does_a_country_join_the_eu/sap/index_en.htm) (accessed 9 January 2010).

<sup>182</sup> European Commission-Enlargement, [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/the-policy/conditions-for-enlargement/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/the-policy/conditions-for-enlargement/index_en.htm) (accessed 9 January 2010).

<sup>183</sup> Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Albania, [http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/en/press\\_releases/european\\_commission\\_presents\\_albania\\_with\\_a\\_questionnaire\\_to\\_assess\\_country039s\\_appli](http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/en/press_releases/european_commission_presents_albania_with_a_questionnaire_to_assess_country039s_appli) (accessed 9 January 2010).

Although Albania appears to be determined on the path towards integration into the European Union, the length of this path will depend on the seriousness and commitment of the Albanian political elites and of Albanian society to accomplish the political and economic reforms that are fundamental conditions for membership. For the Albanian people, EU membership is as much a question of beliefs about their identity and culture as it is an issue of geopolitical and economic interest and development.

## **B. EU: PROMOTING DEMOCRACY THROUGH CONDITIONALITY**

The European Union is considered the most successful international actor for the promotion of democracy in post-communist countries. Since the collapse of the communist system in Eastern Europe, democracy promotion has remained one of the main elements of EU foreign policy, having contributed significantly to the democratization process in these countries. “The attractiveness of EU membership and the strict political conditionality attached to the accession process have vested the EU with considerable transformative power in the applicant countries.”<sup>184</sup> In addition to political changes, the conditionality of the accession process has also “triggered fundamental changes in the CEE [Central and Eastern European] countries,”<sup>185</sup> which consider membership in the EU both as the finalization of their transition process and a significant demonstration of their new status in the international arena. In that regard, the EU is seen “as the most important institution to join, both because of the practical benefits of membership and also because of what it represents.”<sup>186</sup> Furthermore, accession to a unique international organization such as the EU “fulfils the needs of identification and legitimation. Being accepted as a member of an ‘aspiration group’ of

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<sup>184</sup> Frank Schimmelfennig and Hanno Scholtz, “EU Democracy Promotion in the European Neighborhood: Political Conditionality, Economic Development, and Transnational Exchange,” *European Union Politics*, 9, no. 2 (2008):187–215.

<sup>185</sup> Luciano Bardi, Martin Rhodes, and Susan Senior Nello, “Enlarging the European Union: Challenges to and from Central and Eastern Europe,” *International Political Science Review* 23, no. 3 (2002): 227–233.

<sup>186</sup> Karen Henderson, ed., *Back to Europe: Central and Eastern Europe and the European Union* (UCL PRESS, London, 1999), 185.



like-minded or ‘model’ countries assures governments and societies of their identity and of the legitimacy of their political and social values.”<sup>187</sup>

Karen E. Smith describes political conditionality as a mechanism that “entails the linking, by a state or international organization, of perceived benefits to another state (such as aid, trade concessions, cooperation agreements, political contacts, or international organization membership), to the fulfillment of conditions relating to the protection of human rights and advancement of democratic principles.”<sup>188</sup> Any European country seeking membership in the EU must conform to the conditions and principles expressed in Article 6 (1) of the Treaty on European Union. In order to join the EU, a candidate country must meet three criteria:

- 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; [and]
- Acceptance of the Community *acquis*: ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.<sup>189</sup>

Although the Copenhagen European Council in June 1993 did not prioritize these conditions, the Helsinki European Council in December 1999 set democracy as the main prerequisite for beginning negotiations. The Copenhagen criteria are a form of conditionality that not only serve to protect the EU, but also constitute a powerful foreign policy mechanism affecting applicant countries’ domestic and foreign policies and making them do things they otherwise might not do. As Karen E. Smith argues, they “are the EU’s most powerful instrument for influencing the transformation of Eastern Europe.”<sup>190</sup> By using conditionality, the EU considers “the adoption of democratic rules

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<sup>187</sup> Frank Schimmelfennig, *The EU, NATO and the Integration of Europe Rules and Rhetoric* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 73.

<sup>188</sup> Karen E. Smith, *The Use of Political Conditionality in the EU’s Relations with Third Countries: How Effective?* [http://aei.pitt.edu/2729/01/002732\\_1.PDF](http://aei.pitt.edu/2729/01/002732_1.PDF) (accessed 16 January 2010).

<sup>189</sup> Accession Criteria (Copenhagen Criteria), [http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession\\_criteria\\_copenhagen\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhagen_en.htm) (accessed 15 April 2010)

<sup>190</sup> Karen E. Smith, *The Making of EU Foreign Policy the Case of Eastern Europe* (Macmillan Press Ltd, Great Britain, 1999), 139.

and practices as conditions that target countries have to fulfill in order to receive rewards such as financial assistance, some kind of contractual association, or—ultimately—membership.”<sup>191</sup>

The membership of several Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries in the EU and the perspective of membership for the countries of the Western Balkans show that conditions for accession function as an effective leverage for the democratization process in these countries. This confirms the accuracy of the Madrid European Council declaration that “enlargement is both a political necessity and a historic opportunity for Europe. It will ensure the stability and security of the continent and will thus offer both the applicant States and the current members of the Union new prospects for economic growth and general well-being.”<sup>192</sup>

Conditionality of membership has enabled the EU to exercise significant influence in countries of this region, through intensifying accession and association activities oriented toward “preparing them for potential membership.”<sup>193</sup> This process, as Emilian Kavalski argues, “has allowed the EU to demand compliance from Balkan state-elites through the ‘sticks and carrots’ of its membership project or the threat of exclusion from its benefits.”<sup>194</sup> The conditionality mechanism has not only increased the role of the EU in the region, but has also promoted regional cooperation. This has inspired hope that full membership “will finally lay to rest some of the most intractable conflicts of the 19th and 20th centuries.”<sup>195</sup>

Nevertheless, as Olli Rehn, the former EU Commissioner for enlargement, has underlined, “the enlargement of the EU has always been driven by the principle of individual merits and according to the efforts of each candidate state.”<sup>196</sup> In other words,

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<sup>191</sup> Frank Schimmelfennig and Hanno Scholtz, *European Union Politics*, 9, no. 2 (2008):187–215.

<sup>192</sup> Conclusions of the European Council, Madrid, 15–16 December 1995, <http://www.hri.org/docs/madrid95/madr-c3.html> (accessed 17 January 2010).

<sup>193</sup> Emilian Kavalski, *Extending the European Security Community Constructing Peace in the Balkans* 65.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 118–119.

<sup>195</sup> Emilian Kavalski, 135.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

each candidate state must establish a good record of complying with the Copenhagen criteria, a process that requires a deep transformation of the country's laws, institutions, policies and orientations. The process of joining the EU "is much more difficult and complex than is [that of] joining NATO, which essentially requires political commitment and changes to the armed forces."<sup>197</sup> The EU's conditionality policy has also induced a race among candidate countries to move forward, thus creating a competitive environment. This has encouraged candidate states, particularly those sharing the same past, to meet compliance requirements to maintain their place in the accession queue. All candidate countries are subject to the same requirements, and each country's "place in the membership queue has corresponded to the progress it has made toward fulfilling the EU's requirements."<sup>198</sup> On the other hand, the evaluation process is based on merit, using the same standards for all applicant countries.

However, according to Heather Grabbe, "although the conditions seem straightforward, analyzing them is problematic because their interpretation is complex and what would count as meeting them is opaque."<sup>199</sup> She argues that the Copenhagen conditions "are very broad and open to considerable interpretation; elaboration of what constitutes meeting them has progressively widened the detailed criteria for membership, making the Union a moving target for applicants."<sup>200</sup> In spite of that, there is a general consensus that reforms and democratic changes in CEE countries have been impressive. In that context, "the European Union has shaped almost every area of domestic policy-making in candidate and aspiring countries,"<sup>201</sup> thus, making democracy promotion through enlargement a significant and attractive strategy of democratization. Shortly after the collapse of the communist regimes, EU membership became an issue of national

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<sup>197</sup> Heather Grabbe, "The Implications of EU Enlargement," 3, [http://www.cer.org.uk/pdf/grabbe\\_CEE\\_oct02.pdf](http://www.cer.org.uk/pdf/grabbe_CEE_oct02.pdf), (accessed 16 January 2009).

<sup>198</sup> Milada Anna Vachudova, *Europe Undivided Democracy, Leverage, and Integration After Communism* (Oxford University, 2005), 112.

<sup>199</sup> Heather Grabbe, "European Union Conditionality and the *Acquis Communautaire*," *International Political Science Review*, 23, no.3 (2002): 250.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>201</sup> Luciano Bardi, Martin Rhodes, and Susan Senior Nello, "Enlarging the European Union: Challenges to and from Central and Eastern Europe," 229.

interest, for all the countries of CEE, because it offered substantial geopolitical, socio-cultural and economic benefits, including the protection of EU rules for weak states.

Albania and the other countries of the Western Balkans are today at the center of the EU's enlargement process. The prospect of accession to the EU by these countries is expected to provide for the stabilization and revitalization of the region. For that purpose, political elites in these countries "are responding to EU leverage by adopting political and economic agendas that are compatible with the state's bid for EU membership."<sup>202</sup> However, as Milada Anna Vachudova argues, there is a need for adjusting EU leverage for the Western Balkans, and a reconsideration of the EU strategy concerning these countries, because they "need a more dynamic and far-reaching EU strategy that brings more attention and greater resources to bear on supporting positive changes in politics, the economy and society."<sup>203</sup> Many have debated about how effective conditionality is in achieving compliance and promoting certain policies on the part of aspirant countries. Frank Schimmelfennig is of the view that, although "European regional organizations have used a variety of strategies and instruments, only the high material and political rewards of membership in the European Union (EU) . . . have triggered sustained domestic change"<sup>204</sup> in the countries of CEE. Contrary to the accession conditionality of membership, "which consists in a positive strategy of reinforcement by reward,"<sup>205</sup> normative suasion and social influence have not been effective. Although the EU offers material and political rewards in return for norm compliance, it does not coerce non-compliant governments. However, the reward (that is, membership) is withheld. The graded integration process, the association and stabilization process, the candidate status, and finally full membership serve as mechanisms for the EU to assess compliance and the progress made by the aspirant countries.

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<sup>202</sup> Milada Anna Vachudova, "Promoting Political Change and Economic Revitalization in the Western Balkans: The Role of the European Union," <http://www.unc.edu/depts/polisci/UndividedEurope/Readings/Vachudova%20SFPA%20Balkans%20EU%20Dec%2005.pdf> (accessed 16 January 2010).

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Frank Schimmelfennig, "Strategic Calculation and International Socialization: Membership Incentives, Party Constellations, and Sustained Compliance in Central and Eastern Europe," *International Organization* 59, no. 4 (2005): 828.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

Finally, conditionality “has been like a balance between progress and meeting conditions, imposing rigorous checks on the process, but providing appropriate assistance and due rewards for the progress.”<sup>206</sup> EU enlargement has proved to be a powerful and successful tool of EU foreign policy, “and with greater attention and resources, it will help usher in a period of democratic stability and economic revitalization in the Western Balkans.”<sup>207</sup>

### C. ALBANIA AND THE EU: AID AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The transformation in Albania faced particular difficulties related to the introduction of democracy and a market economy. Like the other eastern European countries, Albania experienced a transition from a centralized to a free market economy. This transition required significant institutional changes, large-scale privatizations, clearly defined property rights, and the establishment of institutions that enhanced market exchange. Immediately after the collapse of communism, the country faced economic collapse, social disorder and widespread emigration.

Following the example of other former communist countries, Albania turned, among other organizations, to the EU for financial help and assistance related to political and economic reforms. From that perspective, the role of the EU was significant for an economically backward country like Albania. Furthermore, membership in international organizations and institutions, like the CSCE, the Council of Europe, the IMF and the World Bank, and the intensification of relations “indicate that it [Albania] was attempting to integrate itself quite rapidly into the international system.”<sup>208</sup> EU–Albania relations date back to 1991, when the EU, in a sign of encouragement to political reforms and economic transformation, included Albania in the PHARE assistance program, a “European Union initiative which supports the development of a larger democratic family

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<sup>206</sup> Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *Albania and the European Union the Tumultuous Journey Towards Integration and Accession* (I.B. TAURIS London-New York, 2007), 108.

<sup>207</sup> Milada Anna Vachudova, “Promoting Political Change and Economic Revitalization in the Western Balkans: The Role of the European Union.”

<sup>208</sup> Ailish M. Johnson, Albania’s relations with the EU: on the road to Europe? *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 3, no. 2 (2001): 173.

of nations within a prosperous and stable Europe.”<sup>209</sup> This was the main channel for the EU’s financial and technical support for Albania, and the main financial instrument of the pre-accession strategy for Albania as with other CEE countries that have applied for membership in the European Union.

Receiving funds through the PHARE program helped the country facilitate and support domestic transition efforts. According to Geoffrey Pridham, “The PHARE programme aimed to strengthen administrative structures through helping with reform strategies and training civil servants and offered various projects for institutional development and learning managerial techniques.”<sup>210</sup> Although directed to assist market reforms and restructuring of the economy, the PHARE program was also designed to support “Albania’s ambition to develop further relations with the European Union.”<sup>211</sup>

The inclusion of Albania in the PHARE program placed the EU “in an extraordinary position of influence.”<sup>212</sup> Although it was intended primarily to support the economic transformation of Albania, “its objective [was], in the end, political: in doing so, it will help establish democratic societies based on individual rights.”<sup>213</sup> Only a year later, EU–Albania relations were upgraded with the signing of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) and the initiation of a political dialogue. The initial stage of EU assistance, which covered the period from 1991 to 1997, was mainly focused on emergency and food aid. However, support to the economic reform process was another important area in which EU grants were allocated. In the following years, Albania was able to strengthen its position as a PHARE established partner. The focus of PHARE

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<sup>209</sup> The Phare – Tacis Programmes, <http://cordis.europa.eu/finance/src/phare.htm> (accessed 31 January 2010).

<sup>210</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe* (Great Britain: Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham and Eastbourne, 2005), 125.

<sup>211</sup> Judith Hoffmann, Integrating Albania: The Role of the European Union in the Democratization Process, *Albanian Journal of Politics*, 1, no.1 (2005): 61.

<sup>212</sup> Karen E. Smith, *The Making of EU Foreign Policy the Case of Eastern Europe* (Macmillan Press Ltd, Great Britain, 1999), 70.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

support turned, over time, to the “country’s market reforms and the medium-term restructuring and modernisation of the Albanian economy as well as strengthening of links with the European Union.”<sup>214</sup>

The level of economic development of a democratizing country has a considerable impact on whether the democracy it builds can sustain itself over time. Viewed from this perspective, the 1992 TCA not only constituted an act regulating trade and economic relations, but also “was an essential document that would pave the way for a closer relationship based on the principles of consolidated democracies and eventually for the achievement of Albania’s goal, EU membership.”<sup>215</sup> The preamble of the agreement, while emphasizing the importance of the trade and economic relationship between the Community and Albania, provided that “contractual links . . . will contribute to progress towards the objective of an association agreement in due course, when conditions are met, and to further development of relations between them.”<sup>216</sup>

In 1995, Albania submitted a request to open negotiations for an association agreement, which would establish an association between Albania and the EU and its member states. The General Affairs Council conclusions of 13 May 1996 indicated that such an agreement to open negotiations would constitute an important step towards an association agreement. However, subsequent events related to the parliamentary elections of 26 May 1996, which failed to meet international standards, and the crisis of 1997 caused by the collapse of the pyramid schemes, prevented the European Commission from issuing formal recommendations. A report of the Commission of European Communities (EC) on the feasibility of negotiating a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with Albania, addressing the domestic political situation, stated that:

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<sup>214</sup> The PHARE Program Annual Report 1996, 10, [http://aei.pitt.edu/6805/01/003680\\_1.pdf](http://aei.pitt.edu/6805/01/003680_1.pdf) (accessed 31 January 2010).

<sup>215</sup> Gjergji Vurmo, *Relations of Albania with EU*, 18, [http://web.ceu.hu/cens/assets/files/publications/Albania\\_EU](http://web.ceu.hu/cens/assets/files/publications/Albania_EU) (accessed 7 January 2010).

<sup>216</sup> Official Journal of the European Communities, 25.11.1992: Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Republic of Albania, on trade and commercial and economic cooperation, <http://ec.europa.eu/world/agreements/downloadFile.do?fullText=yes&treatyTransId=570> (accessed 6 February 2010).

Albania remains marked by important economic, political and institutional weaknesses, which do not facilitate the perspective of an association with EC and its member states. At least in parallel to the opening of negotiations, if not before, the country must do its utmost to address these weaknesses. In particular, credible commitments and a timetable for action are necessary . . . for a successful participation of the country in the Stabilisation and Association Process and prerequisites for the upgrading of contractual relations towards an association with EC and its Member States.<sup>217</sup>

Therefore, negotiations for a new agreement with Albania would take into account the political and economic reality of the country. In such circumstances, in order to reach sustainable stabilization and normalization, the European Commission invited the Albanian government to take concrete steps in the main areas of concern, such as:

- macro-economic stabilization and accelerated structural reforms;
- strengthening of security and public order; and
- improvement of governance and strengthening of law enforcement.

In addition, institutional stability, governance, the functioning of the state's administration and the rule of law, as well as the general weakness of the economy due to its dependence on foreign aid, were considered the "basic problems which, at least, hamper a full association with the EC and its Member States."<sup>218</sup> It is obvious that Albanian political elites did not take advantage of the economic assistance offered by the EU to further advance their national political goals, that is, association with the EU through a new contractual relationship. The events of 1996 and 1997 extended their negative impact in the following years, although the EU continued to encourage Albanian leaders in their commitment to stabilize the situation and move forward. EU assistance was then adapted to respond to the new needs of the country and the evolving political situation.

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<sup>217</sup> Commission of the European Communities, Report from the Commission on the feasibility of negotiating a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Albania, Brussels 24.11.1999, 16, <http://aei.pitt.edu/3539/01/000687.pdf> (accessed 7 February 2010).

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.



Following the institutional and economic instability triggered by the collapse of the pyramid schemes, the EU had to reassess its strategy and focused on a number of priority areas, like “restoring and developing governance and promoting civil society; designing and implementing sound economic and social policies; and reviving economic activity.”<sup>219</sup> These priorities were also set in a wider regional context, based on the new regional approach for southeastern European countries.

In 2001, Albania became eligible for CARDS assistance funds. According to the European Commission, “The EU’s CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation) programme brings a more strategic approach to assistance to the Stabilisation and Association Process countries. . . . As each country moves deeper into the Stabilisation and Association Process, assistance focuses increasingly on support for developing government institutions and legislation, and approximation with European norms and eventually harmonisation with EU *acquis* (EU law).”<sup>220</sup> While assistance under PHARE was, among other areas, focused on sectors such as rehabilitating basic infrastructure, transport, agriculture, energy and telecommunications, the CARDS program included support for “democratic stabilisation” and was primarily “adjusted to fit the new requirements, and to support areas that would be of major importance for implementing a future SAA.”<sup>221</sup>

In contrast with the PHARE program, which was demand-driven, the initiation of the CARDS program marked a significant shift to an accession-driven approach, allowing the EU to support activities in important areas that would enhance the future integration process. In conclusion, the EU’s aid and assistance to Albania have been adapted to respond to the needs of the political and economic situation in the country. The EU contributions have moved from emergency assistance to rebuilding infrastructure, from

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<sup>219</sup> Judith Hoffmann, Integrating Albania: The Role of the European Union in the Democratization Process, *Albanian Journal of Politics*, 1, no.1 (2005): 61.

<sup>220</sup> European Commission Enlargement, Stabilisation and Association Agreements, [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement\\_process/accession\\_process/how\\_does\\_a\\_country\\_join\\_the\\_eu/sap/history\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accession_process/how_does_a_country_join_the_eu/sap/history_en.htm) (accessed 8 February 2010).

<sup>221</sup> Judith Hoffmann, Integrating Albania: The Role of the European Union in the Democratization Process, *Albanian Journal of Politics*, 1, no.1 (2005): 63.

economic recovery to developing government institutions, legislation and social development, and from reinforcing democracy and the rule of law to promoting regional cooperation.

#### **D. STABILIZATION AND ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT**

The SAA represents the EU soft-power mechanism of political conditionality. Justice and domestic affairs are of critical importance to the SAA, thereby forming the main component of conditionality for the candidate status of states seeking membership in the EU. As a result of the events in the Western Balkans in 1999, “the role of the EU in the Balkans altered qualitatively.”<sup>222</sup> These events, particularly the Kosovo crisis, made the EU consider a regional approach in order to contribute to peace and prosperity in the region. In May 1999, the EU proposed a Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) for the Western Balkan countries, which was “a historic turning point in the relations between the Western Balkan countries and the EU as a prospect of EU integration was thereby offered.”<sup>223</sup> In the same year, a report by the Commission of the European Communities, on the feasibility of negotiating an SAA with Albania, marked a new phase in Albania’s commitment to a closer relationship with the European Union.

The opening of negotiations for a new agreement was conditioned on the improvement of political and economic conditions in the country. Furthermore, the Commission “invite[d] the Albanian government to give a status report, including a timetable, on actions taken or envisaged in priority areas,”<sup>224</sup> such as macro-economic stabilization, the strengthening of security and public order, and further improvement of governance and law enforcement. Significant improvements in the above areas were set as prerequisites for the successful participation of Albania in the SAP. The EU message for the Albanian elites was clear: progress in compliance with democratic principles,

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<sup>222</sup> Emilian Kavalski, *Extending the European Security Community Constructing Peace in the Balkans*, 121.

<sup>223</sup> Gjergji Vurmo, *Relations of Albania with EU*, 22.

<sup>224</sup> Commission of the European Communities, Report from the Commission on the feasibility of negotiating a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Albania, Brussels 24.11.1999, 17, <http://aei.pitt.edu/3539/01/000687.pdf> (accessed 7 February 2010).

market economy practices, and the rule of law would bring the country closer to membership in the European Union. Meeting EU obligations required the demonstration of sufficient administrative capacity and political will.

By providing a list of obligations to be carried out by the Albanian government, the report marked the launching of a conditionality approach in relations between the EU and Albania. Therefore, the period since 1999 “has been decisive for Albania’s closer integration into European structures.”<sup>225</sup> The new constitution, approved in 1998, provided the basis for the advancement of legal reforms, the consolidation of democratic institutions and achieving the standards of a functioning democracy. In that regard, “the EU appears to be largely perceived as the most important strategic partner for the country,”<sup>226</sup> and is strongly supported by political elites both in government and opposition.

The Zagreb Summit of November 2000 further reinforced the EU commitment towards an Association Agreement (AA) with Albania by establishing an EU-Albania High Level Steering Group (HLSG) “with the objective of stepping up co-operation between the EU and Albania, and identifying and supporting the reforms to be carried out by Albania in preparation for the negotiation of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement.”<sup>227</sup> Evaluating the post-1997 developments in Albania, including the major efforts to restore order and reform economic and social life, the HLSG recommended the perspective of opening SAA negotiations “as the best way of helping to maintain the momentum of recent political and economic reform, and of encouraging Albania to continue its constructive and moderating influence in the region.”<sup>228</sup> According to the

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<sup>225</sup> Judith Hoffmann, Integrating Albania: The Role of the European Union in the Democratization Process, *Albanian Journal of Politics*, 1, no.1 (2005): 65.

<sup>226</sup> Gjergji Vurmo, *Relations of Albania with EU*, 59.

<sup>227</sup> European Commission, Albania Country Strategy Paper 2002-2006, 6, [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/financial\\_assistance/cards/publications/albania\\_strategy\\_paper\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/financial_assistance/cards/publications/albania_strategy_paper_en.pdf) (accessed 14 February 2010).

<sup>228</sup> Commission of the European Communities, Report from the Commission to the Council On the Work of the EU/Albania High Level Steering Group, in Preparation for the Negotiation of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Albania (Brussels: European Commission, COM 2001 0300 final) 8, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2001:0300:FIN:EN:PDF> (accessed 14 February 2010).

HLSG report, the main difficulties reside in the functioning of the judiciary, widespread corruption, a large gray economy, and lack of capacity to implement laws. In addition, an EU-Albania Consultative Task Force (CTF) was established in order to prepare the negotiations of the SAA with Albania.

Increased political instability followed the parliamentary elections of 2001, sharpening tensions between the government and the opposition over the election results. These tensions abated after the election of a consensual president in 2002, but they had an impact in slowing the pace of reforms. At this time, Albanian elites focused their attention on internal political disputes and “short term interests of political leaders had occasionally prevailed over the strategic vision of continued rapprochement to Europe.”<sup>229</sup> As a result, “the influence of EU conditionality on the Albanian reform processes and particularly on the commitment of the ruling political coalition was during this period at quite low levels.”<sup>230</sup> As long as integration is a two-way process, successful application of conditionality “is, however, to a significant degree dependent on the responsiveness of domestic actors, with their European commitment being the decisive factor.”<sup>231</sup> Nevertheless, the EU continued to appeal to the Albanian political elites to guarantee a stable political environment with fully functioning democratic institutions as the only way to make further progress towards an SAP.

Negotiations for an SAA with Albania were officially opened on 31 January 2003. The commitment of the Albanian government to move political and economic reforms forward was critical for the progress of the negotiations. In order for the member states to monitor the negotiation process, the European Commission was provided with a specific mandate that allowed the continuation of the CTF meetings including the member states’ representatives. While this has not been the case with Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, “continuation of the CTF was seen as an important instrument to maintain a platform for discussing and monitoring Albania’s

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<sup>229</sup> Commission of the European Communities, Commission Staff Working Paper, Albania Stabilisation and Association Report, 21.

<sup>230</sup> Gjergji Vurmo, *Relations of Albania with EU*, 63.

<sup>231</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe*, 9.

general reform progress, e.g., regarding the development of democratic institutions and rule of law.”<sup>232</sup> The conclusion of the negotiations strongly demanded the acceleration of reforms. In particular, the reform efforts should concentrate on the following areas:

preserving political stability, reinforcing democracy and ensuring free and fair electoral processes, improving the upholding of human and minority rights, intensifying the fight against fraud, corruption, organised crime and trafficking, substantially increasing implementation and enforcement capacities (notably through an enhanced public administration and judiciary), reinforcing the structures directly involved in the implementation of a future SAA as well as those responsible for implementing international financial assistance, improving fiscal sustainability, completing the privatisation process in all strategic sectors, properly addressing the energy crisis, resolving the land property-related issues and developing an efficient land market.<sup>233</sup>

The accomplishment of these reforms would remain a precondition for the conclusion of the SAA. While the EU has continuously stressed the importance of reforms, the Albanian political elites did not seem to be on the same wave length, regardless of their statements that progress in SAP is a top priority. Concrete results have fallen short of EU expectations. Beyond declarations, the government was expected to demonstrate, through its actions, the necessary determination to address the key reforms. Although the perspective of integration is usually perceived as a strong leverage to induce reforms, this does not seem to be the case with Albania. Judith Hoffman argues that the slow pace of reforms is related to three main factors. First, the establishment of a Free Trade Area with the EU, in the long run, will diminish the custom revenues for Albania. Second, “the Albanian governing elites as a political actor with short term interests can not see the immediate benefits of compliance with EU conditions since the EU membership still has a long way to go.”<sup>234</sup> Third, the internal political instability has shifted the political interest from EU integration issues to the struggle for power between the majority and the opposition.

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<sup>232</sup> Judith Hoffmann, *Integrating Albania: The Role of the European Union in the Democratization Process*, *Albanian Journal of Politics*, 1, no.1 (2005): 67.

<sup>233</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *Commission Staff Working Paper, Albania Stabilisation and Association Report 2003*, 19.

<sup>234</sup> Judith Hoffmann, “Integrating Albania: The Role of the European Union in the Democratization Process,” *Albanian Journal of Politics*, 1, no.1 (2005): 69.

However, the EU conditionality and the integration-oriented perspective of the EU's relations with Albania were of significant importance for the progress achieved in the 2005 elections to the National Assembly. Progress in these elections was also influenced by the "internal pressure by the opposition and more importantly, by the general public and the civil society structures that made clear that this was the last chance for Albania to change attitude and start addressing pressing concerns and thus move forward in the integration process."<sup>235</sup> By this time, increasing internal pressure by civil society groups and other non-political actors was a clear indicator of the impact of the EU conditionality mechanisms, which in the context of the SA process "are far more developed and efficient than the previous period."<sup>236</sup>

A new stage in Albania-EU relations was confirmed by the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement on 12 June 2006, which provided not only for a clearer membership perspective than before, but also for a new context for the implementation of long-term reforms, particularly the incorporation of the EU's *acquis communautaire* into domestic law. The signing of the SAA represents the most important step on Albania's path towards EU membership, and it is extremely important for Albania's future and its EU perspective. Its successful implementation is of significant importance before further formal steps towards EU membership can be considered. On 12 June 2006, Albania entered "into a more advanced phase in its relationship with the EU, which implies increased responsibilities."<sup>237</sup> By adopting a National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI), the new government<sup>238</sup> established a strategic and operational framework which should help in the fulfillment of its SAA reform commitments.

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<sup>235</sup> Gjergji Vurmo, *Relations of Albania with EU*, 64.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Signature of Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and the Republic of Albania, Speech of Ursula Plassnik, President of the Council, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=PRES/06/182&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en> (accessed 17 February 2009).

<sup>238</sup> Elections to the National Assembly took place on 3 July 2005. The Democratic Party (DP) and its allies gained a total of 80 seats compared with 60 seats for the Socialist Party (SP) and other parties. A new DP-led government, headed by Mr. Sali Berisha, took office in September 2005.

## **E. EU: IMPACT ON DOMESTIC REFORMS**

Following the opening of negotiations with the European Commission on an SAA, and taking into account the new stage of relations with the EU, the newly established Ministry of European Integration (MEI) was tasked with the overall coordination of Albania's EU integration process. The MEI undertook revisions in legislation, the formulation of integration policies, and the coordination of financial assistance and public information. As in other aspirant countries, one relevant feature was "the appointment to influential positions in European policy of younger personnel, given they are less likely to be tainted with the Communist experience and generally show a greater facility with foreign languages."<sup>239</sup>

Increased interaction and involvement with the EU have affected internal restructuring and have promoted greater participation and influence by non-political actors, civil society and business in the decision-making process in the country. To respond to the EU's call for increased attention to good governance, the rule of law and effective public administration, the Berisha government restructured government institutions, thus providing for more interministerial cooperation, and made "some progress in strengthening its government structures to address its commitments towards the EU and the broader development agenda."<sup>240</sup> Policy and strategy functions have been given greater prominence in ministries. In addition, the elaboration of sector strategies, under the national strategy for development and integration, was carried out in a transparent and open manner. The civil registry and the national address system are being strengthened. In parallel, electronic identification cards and biometric passports are being developed. However, the 2009 EU progress report expressed concern about the tendency of the government to exert control over independent institutions, in particular the judiciary.

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<sup>239</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe* (Great Britain: Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham and Eastbourne, 2005), 83.

<sup>240</sup> Commission of the European Communities, Commission Staff Working Document Albania 200, Progress Report, 7, [http://mie.gov.al/skedaret/1194876378-Progr.raport%202007%20\(english\).pdf](http://mie.gov.al/skedaret/1194876378-Progr.raport%202007%20(english).pdf) (accessed 17 February 2010).

Parliament has further consolidated its role as a forum for political debate. The establishment of the European integration committee added to the Euro-focused institutionalization of efforts at the parliamentary level. A considerable number of laws have been passed to revise the Albanian legislation in accordance with the EU *acquis*, although this legal process continues to remain the main challenge. However, the role of Parliament in monitoring the implementation of SAA obligations remains weak, and “the level of expertise available to parliament had an adverse effect on the quality of EU-related legislation.”<sup>241</sup> The demands of the European integration process “have also impacted on executive-parliament relations and acted to empower the former at the expense of the latter.”<sup>242</sup> Further progress on EU-relevant legislation requires the parliament “to strengthen administrative capacities to perform its control functions over the legislative process.”<sup>243</sup> The entry into force of the SAA, in April 2009, was not matched by a strengthening of administrative capacity to monitor SAA commitments.

Overall, the public administration is stabilizing and becoming somewhat more focused. In order to attract Albanian graduates of foreign universities, the government has changed the civil service recruitment process. The Civil Service law also provides for the participation of minorities in the public administration, the army and the police. However, with the legal framework for public administration reform in place “the lack of transparency and accountability in appointments remains a key European Partnership priority to be addressed.”<sup>244</sup> Professionalizing the public administration and adapting its institutional structures to SAA-related demands remain challenges for the future.

Although the government has approved a new anti-corruption strategy, including anti-corruption agencies and legislation, and continues to address the struggle against

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<sup>241</sup> Commission of the European Communities, Commission Staff Working Document Albania 2008 Progress Report, accompanying the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2008-2009. 7, <http://mie.gov.al/skedaret/1230025113-Progres%20Raporti%202008.pdf> (accessed 17 February 2010).

<sup>242</sup> John O’ Brennan and Esmeralda Gassie, “From Stabilization to Consolidation: Albania State Capacity and Adaptation to European Union Rules,” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 11, no.1 (2009): 74.

<sup>243</sup> Commission of the European Communities, Commission Staff Working Document Albania 2008 Progress Report, 7.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.



corruption as a key European Union partnership priority, “corruption is widespread and constitutes a very serious problem in Albania.”<sup>245</sup> While Albania showed notable improvement in the fight against corruption in 2008, there was regression in 2009. According to Transparency International, “Albania marks 3.2 points in the annual Corruption Perception Index for 2009, from 3.4 that was in 2008.”<sup>246</sup> The challenge of fighting corruption requires, first of all, functioning societal and governmental institutions. Failure to properly address this issue “raises the potential for deeper disillusionment with the political class, with possible implications for democratic consolidation.”<sup>247</sup>

Despite the progress achieved, judicial reform in Albania remains at an early stage, and the “justice system continues to function poorly due to shortcomings in independence, transparency and efficiency, which are key European priorities to be addressed.”<sup>248</sup> Given the importance of the justice system, as one of the primary vehicles for encouraging the rule of law, “Albania’s journey toward EU membership is therefore closely associated with if not dependent on the nature of changes to emerge within the judicial system.”<sup>249</sup> In addition to problems pertaining to independence, transparency and professionalism, the “separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judiciary is fragile and intermittently damaged by jurisdictional arguments and conflicts

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<sup>245</sup> Commission of the European Communities, Commission Staff Working Document Albania 2008 Progress Report, 7.

<sup>246</sup> Transparency International, Corruption Perception Index, 2009 Eastern Europe and Central Asia, [http://www.tia.al/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=86:eastern-europe-and-central-asia-&catid=35:press-releases&Itemid=62](http://www.tia.al/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=86:eastern-europe-and-central-asia-&catid=35:press-releases&Itemid=62) (accessed 22 February 2010). The vast majority of the 180 countries included in the 2009 index score below five on a scale from 0 (perceived to be highly corrupt) to 10 (perceived to have low levels of corruption),” [http://www.transparency.org/news\\_room/latest\\_news/press\\_releases/2009/2009\\_11\\_17\\_cpi2009\\_en](http://www.transparency.org/news_room/latest_news/press_releases/2009/2009_11_17_cpi2009_en) (accessed 5 April 2010).

<sup>247</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe*, 136.

<sup>248</sup> Commission of the European Communities, Commission Staff Working Document Albania 2009 Progress Report, accompanying the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2009–2010. 11, [http://mie.gov.al/skedaret/1256019592-AL\\_Rapport.pdf](http://mie.gov.al/skedaret/1256019592-AL_Rapport.pdf) (accessed 5 April 2010).

<sup>249</sup> John O’Brennan and Esmeralda Gassie, “From Stabilization to Consolidation: Albania State Capacity and Adaptation to European Union Rules,” *Journal of Balkan and near Eastern Studies*, 11, no.1 (2009): 77.

over constitutional interpretation. The judiciary's independence has been repeatedly jeopardized by arbitrary interference from politicians of both the government and the opposition."<sup>250</sup> Albania has nonetheless received considerable international rule-of-law assistance. Judicial reform is one of the primary political conditions, "for it is fundamental to the rule of law which is central to the functioning of liberal democracies."<sup>251</sup>

With respect to human rights and minorities, Albania has ratified most of the international human rights instruments, and has an adequate body of legislation that guarantees the promotion and enforcement of human rights. Still, much more is required to be done to enforce the existing legislation, particularly with regard to torture and ill treatment, gender equality, child protection and discrimination.

The number and substantive quality of bilateral activities are indications of Albania's continuing commitment to maintaining positive relations with neighboring countries and EU member states. "Regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations form an essential part of the process of moving towards the European Union."<sup>252</sup> Albania is also active in regional initiatives, including the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), the Energy Community Treaty (ECT) and the European Common Aviation Area Agreement (ECAA).

The European Council in Copenhagen in June 1993 stated that membership in the European Union requires the existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the European Union. From that perspective, it is noteworthy that the Albanian economy continues to expand. It "recorded strong and sustained growth of 8 percent in 2008 and, according to the authorities' data, of 6 percent in the first quarter of 2009, mainly driven by large public

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<sup>250</sup> Adelheid Felicke-Tiemann, "Albania: Gradual Consolidation Limited by Internal Political Struggles," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 6, no.1 (2006): 29.

<sup>251</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe*, 134.

<sup>252</sup> Commission of the European Communities Albania 2009 Progress Report, 18, [http://mie.gov.al/skedaret/1256019592-AL\\_Rapport.pdf](http://mie.gov.al/skedaret/1256019592-AL_Rapport.pdf) (accessed 20 February 2010).

investments in the road network.”<sup>253</sup> The EU remained the main trading partner of Albania in 2008, and trade with CEFTA countries increased.

Annual reports by the European Commission on the progress made towards the accomplishment of EU commitments by Albania have served to mobilize support for specified reforms within the government and general public. Because European integration has become a priority issue, these reports have received special attention from the Albanian political elites and the media. In that regard, these reports “have become a powerful instrument for redistribution of political information in favor of mobilization of support for EU-recommended action.”<sup>254</sup> Furthermore, these reports have been used to identify future priorities for all government institutions and have inspired domestic competition among political elites, thus making EU evaluation on the progress of reforms increasingly influential.

The influence of the European Union through a combination of the stick (via the progress reports) and the carrot (through the perspective of membership) has been decisive in spurring the Albanian government into action, although sometimes the implementation of EU recommendations has been comparatively slow.

## **F. FUTURE EU PERSPECTIVE FOR ALBANIA**

Immediately after joining NATO on 1 April 2009, Albania submitted its formal application for membership in the EU, which remains the primary future geopolitical orientation for the country. The Council of the EU has invited the European Commission to submit its opinion on Albania’s application for membership. The opinion will constitute a comprehensive analysis of the country's capacity to meet the criteria for membership in the EU. The submission date for this opinion has not yet been established.

When will Albania join the EU? This question has been raised frequently, not only by the general public, but also by political elites. The EU stands by the commitment

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<sup>253</sup> Commission of the European Communities Albania 2009 Progress Report, 20, [http://mie.gov.al/skedaret/1256019592-AL\\_Rapport.pdf](http://mie.gov.al/skedaret/1256019592-AL_Rapport.pdf) (accessed 20 February 2010).

<sup>254</sup> Tsveta Petrova, “Do the Ends Justify the Means: NATO and EU Involvement in Central and Eastern Europe,” 42, <http://www.johnsoninstitute-gspia.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=bIvFCr82bGU%3D&tabid=423> (accessed 22 February 2010).

expressed at the Thessaloniki Summit that “The future of the Balkans is within the European Union.”<sup>255</sup> At the same time, however, the European Commission has stated that “the EU must equally stand by the conditions which must be met [by Albania] in order to move towards the EU.”<sup>256</sup> While the accession criteria are the same for all countries aspiring to become EU members, the response to the timing question rests on the commitment of the Albanian political elites and public “to establish a sustained record of successful implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement.”<sup>257</sup> As mentioned earlier, the evaluation process is based on merit, using the same standards for all applicant countries. From that perspective, the outcome depends on the other side in the interactive dynamics of EU accession, particularly the domestic politics of Albania as an aspirant country. Hence, “it is not the date but the progress to meet the requirements that matters most.”<sup>258</sup>

Albania is now at a stage in which government efforts are focused on the successful implementation of the SAA, and on the content of European Union- relevant legislation. At this point, political stability is “crucial both in convincing Brussels of an applicant country’s good intentions but also in terms of the domestic dynamic that helps to drive the accession forward.”<sup>259</sup> The Albanian government should, therefore, take advantage of the high level of public support for the EU and maintain a political consensus behind its European integration policies.

Shortly after the elections to the National Assembly in June 2009, the country experienced another political crisis. The Socialist Party (SP), which won 65 of 140 seats in Parliament, has been boycotting the Assembly since September 2009, claiming that the elections were manipulated. The SP boycott has paralyzed the adoption of the EU-

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<sup>255</sup> European Commission Enlargement, EU-Western Balkans Summit-Declaration, Thessaloniki 21 June 2003, [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/questions\\_and\\_answers/albania\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/questions_and_answers/albania_en.htm) (accessed 23 February 2010).

<sup>256</sup> European Commission Enlargement, Albania – Questions and Answers, [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/questions\\_and\\_answers/albania\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/questions_and_answers/albania_en.htm) (accessed 23 February 2010).

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Gjergji Vurmo *Relations of Albania with EU*, 66.

<sup>259</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe*, 110.

required laws. Given the significant importance of the EU's political criteria, the parliamentary boycott "would have a negative impact on the analysis of the political criteria and thus have negative ramifications on the chances of being granted candidate status by the European Union."<sup>260</sup>

While the country has gradually moved toward democratic consolidation, internal political struggle and "the absence of parliamentary dialogue and recourse to boycotts, especially following election results, is a recurrent problem in Albania which seriously hampers the democratic functioning of the state's institutions."<sup>261</sup> The political crisis has endangered the country's EU accession efforts, and "its application to join the EU is in jeopardy unless a damaging political crisis is resolved."<sup>262</sup> This is why the EU member countries' diplomats urged the main political parties to reach a compromise. According to the Spanish Ambassador to Tirana, "the EU perspective for Albania is at stake."<sup>263</sup>

There is a general consensus that the integration of Albania into EU structures requires significant reforms in most policy areas related to democratic governance, particularly ensuring the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the protection of minorities, and the development of a market economy. The perspective of future EU membership serves as an incentive for reform. Therefore, it is important for Albanian elites "to understand that they have to carry out wide-ranging reforms not because the EU asks them to do so, but because they have to do so to address the needs of the citizens, to raise their living standards."<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Olli Rehn, Former EU Enlargement Commissioner, [http://www.rferl.org/content/EU\\_States\\_Back\\_Albanias\\_Bid\\_To\\_Start\\_Membership\\_Process/1875775.htm](http://www.rferl.org/content/EU_States_Back_Albanias_Bid_To_Start_Membership_Process/1875775.htm) (accessed 22 February 2010).

<sup>261</sup> Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, "The Functioning of Democratic Institutions in Albania," <http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc10/EDOC12113.htm> (accessed 4 March 2010).

<sup>262</sup> Europe warns deadlocked Albania to put political house in order, <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,5259561,00.html?maca=en-rss-en-all-1573-rdf> (accessed 4 March 2010).

<sup>263</sup> Manuel Montobbio de Balanzo, Spanish Ambassador to Albania, <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,5259561,00.html?maca=en-rss-en-all-1573-rdf> (accessed 4 March 2010).

<sup>264</sup> Reinhard Priebe, The Western Balkan European Perspective, [http://www.oenb.at/en/img/ceei\\_paper\\_priebe\\_tcm16-22780.pdf](http://www.oenb.at/en/img/ceei_paper_priebe_tcm16-22780.pdf) (accessed 25 February 2010).

An important step in the short term would be meeting the requirements for the lifting of visas that would enable Albanian citizens to travel freely to EU member states. This is a process that requires tangible reforms in areas such as document security, illegal migration, public order and security. The speed of movement toward visa liberalization will depend on the progress achieved to meet the requirements set. Visa liberalization will enhance business and cultural cooperation between Albania and the EU, thus moving the country a step closer to EU membership.

In addition to the support of external actors, the delivery of EU-oriented reforms is “the responsibility of the domestic actors, in particular the politicians.”<sup>265</sup> Because integration is a complex process with institutional and policy dimensions, “elite understanding is quite vital in directing a country’s accession.”<sup>266</sup> In that regard, it is important for Albania “to ensure that reforms are not only EU compatible but also that, at the same time, they address particular needs of the country that legislation is enforceable, [and] that institutions required to implement these reforms are consolidated.”<sup>267</sup>

The EU perspective for Albania is the final confirmation of the “four imperatives,”<sup>268</sup> which are crucial to its external policy redirection. EU membership—in other words, the return to Europe—is first a historical imperative which allows the country to leave behind the painful transition period “and to seek a brighter future within the European integration.”<sup>269</sup> While membership in the EU is the most profitable choice for stable economic development and building a democratic and orderly society, there is a common perception among Albanian political elites and civil society groups that EU membership is central to the “process of democratization if not crucial to its successful

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<sup>265</sup> Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *Albania and the European Union the Tumultuous Journey Towards Integration and Accession*, 242.

<sup>266</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe*, 79.

<sup>267</sup> Reinhard Priebe, The Western Balkan European Perspective, [http://www.oenb.at/en/img/ceei\\_paper\\_priebe\\_tcm16-22780.pdf](http://www.oenb.at/en/img/ceei_paper_priebe_tcm16-22780.pdf) (accessed 25 February 2010).

<sup>268</sup> Geoffrey Pridham relates the “return to Europe” of the post-communist states to four imperatives: 1) the historical imperative, 2) the democratic imperative, 3) the security imperative and 4) the modernizing/economic imperative. See Pridham, *Designing Democracy* 84 – 95.

<sup>269</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe*, 77.

outcome.”<sup>270</sup> Thus, it is a democratic imperative. This is why for the Albanian government, European Union membership “represents a main national priority.”<sup>271</sup>

EU membership for a small NATO member country like Albania will constitute the final step towards Euro-Atlantic integration. Joining the EU offers Albania a broader sense of security, “including ‘soft’ security matters . . . such as in relation to questions of justice and home affairs.”<sup>272</sup> It will also provide for a stronger commitment, by the EU, of political solidarity to Albania as a new member, which is “seen widely as a de facto form of security guarantee.”<sup>273</sup> Not less important is the modernizing and economic imperative. In general, modernization is associated with economic development and prosperity, and with the further opportunities offered by European integration. EU membership will not only speed up Albania’s development, it will also offer better access to markets and trade development, encourage foreign investment, and provide for a “greater sense of economic certainty and a reinforcement of the practices of the market economy.”<sup>274</sup> Sustaining a functioning market economy, with the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the European Union, is one of the Copenhagen criteria. While Albania has already embarked on marketization, the dynamics of EU integration will provide “a strong pressure to speed up this change.”<sup>275</sup> However, as Geoffrey Pridham argues, in addition to the influence from the EU’s

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<sup>270</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe*, 77.

<sup>271</sup> Ministry of European Integration of Albania, Government Program, <http://www.mie.gov.al/?fq=brenda&d=3&gj=gj2&kid=138> (accessed 28 February 2010).

<sup>272</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe*, 91.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Alan Mayhew, *Recreating Europe: The European Union’s Policy Towards Central and Eastern Europe*, quoted in Geoffrey Pridham, *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe*, 93.

<sup>275</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe*, 94.

leverage over Albania, “a crucial factor was [and remains] the commitment and will of governments there over joining the EU and staying the course of membership negotiations.”<sup>276</sup>

The whole EU integration process requires deep structural and institutional reforms, particularly related to democratic governance, the rule of law and the fight against corruption, human rights and the further development of a market economy. This process should encourage and promote democratic consolidation, and must be used to achieve genuine progress. The achievement of these reforms will take time. Strong public support and cross-party consensus over EU integration, along with the four imperatives addressed above, are a compelling motivation for the Albanian governing elites to speed up the EU integration process. The neighboring countries are moving fast in that direction. After almost twenty years since the collapse of the communist regime, Albania has no time to lose.

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<sup>276</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe*, 94.



## V. CONCLUSIONS

Since the collapse of communism, the policy agenda of Albanian political elites has been strongly influenced by the desire to join international organizations. Following a long period of extreme isolation, membership in these organizations would offer Albania a new place in the international arena. The change of regime was accompanied by an influx of international actors and organizations offering to assist the Albanian government and society in their transition away from communism. As noted in this thesis, bilateral assistance was provided mostly by Western European states and the United States, and by international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which (in addition to emergency financial assistance) provided support for democracy promotion, which “is now one of the leading international ‘industries.’”<sup>277</sup>

The post-communist Albanian elites declared “return to Europe” as their first foreign policy priority. Therefore, they increasingly focused their efforts on satisfying the requirements of accession to the main Euro-Atlantic international organizations, particularly the OSCE, NATO, and most recently the EU. These three organizations became the dominant sources of assistance and support driving policy changes in the country. They have accordingly played a significant role in the post-communist transition of Albania. Regardless of the diverse methods, instruments and resources they use, they share the same objective: to help promote democracy, stability and security. While Albania became an OSCE participating state as early as 1992, NATO and the EU identified democracy development as a precondition for joining their ranks in the future, thus applying, as with other eastern European countries, a policy of conditionality by establishing a direct linkage between membership and democracy.

Political elites in Albania supported the NATO and EU policies of conditionality, as they believed that Western democracy was the only and best choice for Albania.

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<sup>277</sup> Jan Zielonka, “The United States, the European Union and the Consolidation of Democracy in Eastern Europe,” <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ord655=grp2&ots591=0C54E3B3-1E9C-BE1E-2C24-A6A8C7060233&lng=en&id=48276> (accessed 16 March 2010).

However, the process of obtaining NATO membership took longer than anticipated, and the EU accession process is a political project not yet completed, although it represents the European Union's most powerful leverage on Albania as an applicant country. By giving top priority to democracy promotion, as the embodiment of economic and political success, the EU has already become the main pole of attraction for Albania. In many respects the EU's conditionality differs from that of other multinational organizations. Although EU demands are reinforced by extensive monitoring, the membership incentive has provided the vehicle for a strong external influence on the path of democratization.

Albania has made remarkable progress in its transition to a market economy and a liberal democracy. This progress owes a lot to the influence and support of Western governments and Euro-Atlantic organizations. Pursuing membership in these organizations has formed the cornerstone of the foreign policy of successive Albanian governments, which have sought to establish the West as the final destination of their democratic projects. Meeting membership criteria, particularly with NATO and the EU, has increasingly shaped policy choices during the past two decades, and this has accelerated the democratization process of the country.

While the CSCE's conditionality for participation was not highly exigent, Albania's early participation in this organization proved to be an effective mechanism in influencing future democracy developments. In an international context, the CSCE process was essentially important, and "the ideological warfare that the West pursued throughout the years of communism did play an important role in de-legitimizing the communist system."<sup>278</sup> In a national context, by putting a strong emphasis on the human rights dimension, the CSCE played an important role in encouraging the opposition movement in Albania. In addition, participation in the OSCE and other international organizations, including the Council of Europe, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, opened the country to the socializing influences of international actors that supported the process of building democratic institutions and carrying out fundamental

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<sup>278</sup> Sten Berglund, Frank H. Aarebrot, Henry Vogt and Georgi Karasimeonov, *Challenges to Democracy: Eastern Europe Ten Years after the Collapse of Communism* (Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK, Northampton, MA, USA, 2001) 26.

reforms in preparation for NATO membership and, in the near future, EU membership. In particular, cooperation with the OSCE was important for Albania because “it grants the stamp of international recognition to countries that carry out fair and free elections and strictly observe other democratic procedures.”<sup>279</sup> Membership in these organizations has long been considered a gateway to wider European integration.

Although the importance of domestic political actors for democracy building cannot be ignored, this thesis has addressed the role played by international organizations in creating an environment conducive to democratic reform, thereby helping the democratization process in Albania. “Linking membership of Western institutions to democracy and other reforms has been a characteristic feature of the crafting effort.”<sup>280</sup> Many have debated the importance of historical legacies in countries undergoing democratic transitions. In that regard, it is impossible to explain democratic developments in Albania without referring to the long communist legacy, because Albania suffered under one of the harshest dictatorships in Eastern Europe and was one of the most isolated countries in Europe. Hence, Albania was “too inexperienced and too fragile to be able to cope effectively with the unexpected and powerful impact of globalization.”<sup>281</sup> This is why cooperation with international organizations was the only choice for Albania to “return to Europe” after 45 years of communist rule. However, the historical legacy and influence affected both the transition and the democratic consolidation process in Albania.

International organizations have shaped domestic politics in Albania, but the question remains: how much impact have they had? This is an issue of the extent to which domestic politics in Albania converged with the prescriptions of Euro-Atlantic international institutions, and the effect of conditionality in determining from outside the course of domestic reforms. The thesis concludes that, although there has been a large

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<sup>279</sup> Antoaneta Dimitrova and Geoffrey Pridham, “International Actors and Democracy Promotion in Central and Eastern Europe: The Integration Model and its Limits,” *Democratization* 11, no. 5 (2004): 100.

<sup>280</sup> Jan Zielonka, “Conclusions: Foreign Made Democracy,” in Jan Zielonka and Alex Pravda, ed., *Democratic Consolidation in Eastern Europe, Volume 2, International and Transnational Factors* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 522.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 517.

degree of convergence, there have also been periods of divergence in the policies pursued. Jan Zielonka observes that “the overall capacity of state institutions to cope with these [internal and external] pressures ultimately determined the balance between the impact of policies and processes. In Albania the state was extremely weak and thus fell prey to both external and internal processes beyond its control.”<sup>282</sup> Other domestic factors, such as cultural traditions, economic backwardness, an underdeveloped party system, weak administrative capacities, and divided leadership have affected the course of democracy development in Albania. In addition, internal political disputes and the recurrent focus on short-term political interests have created, during certain periods, an unfavorable environment for the achievement of necessary reforms. These internal factors have affected the speed of democratic reforms in the country. However, the democratization process in Albania “could have had a different trajectory without the presence of the EU pushing for and directing reforms.”<sup>283</sup>

As noted previously, the prospect of EU membership was made clearer for Albania with the signing of a Stabilization and Association Agreement in June 2006. This was a turning point in the political discourse in Albania about undertaking radical reforms and staying committed to the democratic path. For many years, the governing elites in Albania, both in the government and the opposition, have declared that EU membership would be unambiguously beneficial. This is true. In contrast to NATO, “the EU offers not only a form of security but also, especially economic as well as political benefits to the states that join it.”<sup>284</sup> When Albania becomes an EU member, many of the barriers to trade, investment, and the free movement of labor will disappear. Exchanges of knowledge, technology, and new ideas will become easier. Foreign competition will enhance business transparency, and access to the common market will improve the

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<sup>282</sup> Jan Zielonka, “Conclusions: Foreign Made Democracy,” in Jan Zielonka and Alex Pravda, ed., *Democratic Consolidation in Eastern Europe, Volume 2, International and Transnational Factors* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 522.

<sup>283</sup> Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin, *Albania and the European Union the Tumultuous Journey Towards Integration and Accession* (I.B. TAURIS London-New York, 2007), 241.

<sup>284</sup> Antoaneta Dimitrova and Geoffrey Pridham, “International Actors and Democracy Promotion in Central and Eastern Europe: The Integration Model and Its Limits,” *Democratization* 11, no. 5 (2004): 94.

attractiveness of Albania as a destination for foreign investment. Productivity of capital and labor will increase, and consumer goods will become cheaper, better in quality, and more diverse.

Although public support for membership in the EU remains high at 88 percent,<sup>285</sup> important doubts persist concerning the perception of the integration process as whole. It is perceived as a decision to be taken in Brussels rather than an effort by Albania to carry out reforms and meet membership criteria. A survey by the Albanian Institute for International Studies indicates that “most respondents marked free movement into other EU countries as the most important benefit from EU membership.”<sup>286</sup> Free movement is understood simply as the freedom to travel without visas, rather than in its broader sense as the free movement of labor, capital and businesses. Furthermore, there seems to be little awareness that free movement will not be of much use without economic development, democratization, and social well-being in Albania. It appears that, rather than achieving these goals, many Albanians are interested in leaving the country, and “integration into [the] EU seems to be perceived as a means to this end.”<sup>287</sup>

Besides the benefits mentioned above, EU membership will require substantial budgetary outlays and large public sector investments in infrastructure, agriculture, the environment and other sectors, which will all significantly affect the performance of the economy. Additional costs and obligations will arise from the payment of contributions to the EU budget after Albania joins. Joining the EU will not occur without pain. Opening Albanian markets to tariff-free goods will no doubt introduce new competition and hurt domestic Albanian companies. Besides restructuring the economy in an increasingly competitive EU environment, the Albanian government may also have to adopt economic measures to finance EU law implementation.

As with the other post-communist countries of central and Eastern Europe, the benefits of being inside the EU will outweigh the costs. Access to the large EU market

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<sup>285</sup> Albanian School of Political Studies, [www.shkollapolitike.org](http://www.shkollapolitike.org) (accessed 17 March 2010).

<sup>286</sup> Perceptions of and Knowledge on European Union and EU Integration for Albania, <http://www.emins.rs/sr/aktivnosti/konferencije/solun/pdf/radovi/alb-iis.pdf> (accessed 17 March 2010).

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

could help ensure the realization of economic growth rates that may over time close the existing GDP per capita gap between Albania and other EU members. Although joining the EU will entail significant costs in the short run, membership will, it is hoped, send a positive signal for more foreign investments, and strengthen Albania's international position. However, significant challenges remain, including political and governmental stability, enforcing the rule of law, conducting elections in full compliance with international standards, developing civil society, fighting against corruption and organized crime, strengthening the public administration, and ensuring independence for the judiciary.

NATO membership has been the most important achievement to date of post-communist Albania, and a significant indication of the democratic development of the country. The Albanian political class should build on this accomplishment and continue to construct a stable democracy based on European standards, further consolidate democratic institutions, ensure economic growth, and attract more foreign investment. Democracy in Albania "will be judged more and more on its own merits than by way of comparison with the past."<sup>288</sup> This is why Albanian political elites should focus more on addressing the challenges of the future. This is the only way to shorten the path towards EU membership as the best guarantee of democratization and progress in Albania.

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<sup>288</sup> Sten Berglund, Frank H. Aarebrot, Henry Vogt and Georgi Karasimeonov, *Challenges to Democracy* (Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK, Northampton, MA, USA, 2001) 41.

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