

CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
Institute of International Studies
Department of Russian and East European Studies

M. A. Dissertation

2012

Ergys Bruci

CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of International Studies
Department of Russian and East European Studies

Ergys Bruçi

**The Impact of the EU Accession Process in
Shaping Democratization: The case of Albania**

M. A. Dissertation

Prague 2012

Author: Ergys Bruci

Supervisor: Mgr. Kamil Pikal

Year of defense: 2012

Bibliographical record

BRUCI, Ergys. *The Impact of the EU Accession Process in Shaping Democratization: The case of Albania*. Prague 2012. 92 pp. M. A. Dissertation, Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of International Studies, Department of Russian and East European Studies. Supervisor: Mgr. Kamil Píkal.

Word Count: 21,564

Abstrakt

Přístupový proces Albánie do Evropské unie je nadefinován postupným plněním Kodaňských kritérií. Evropská unie vyvíjí tlak na politické struktury Albánie prostřednictvím europeizačních mechanismů; cílem tohoto tlaku je podpořit demokratizační reformy a dosáhnout pokroku v plnění Kodaňských kritérií. Předkládaná diplomová práce s užitím kvalitativní analýzy prověřuje, jaký je dopad europeizačních mechanismů na proces demokratizace v Albánii v době po podpisu Stabilizační a asociační smlouvy. Teoretický rámec práce se nachází v oblasti teorie europeizace a teorie kvality demokracie. Data shromážděná pomocí analýzy dokumentů a rozhovorů jsou využita k testování hypotézy o přímém vztahu mezi europeizací a demokratizací v případě Albánie. Výsledky ukazují, že jak samotná koncepce demokratizace, tak i její aplikace s ohledem na demokratizační proces naráží na řadu problémů. Demokratizace je procesem zasahujícím politické struktury, praxi a normy. Europeizační mechanismy ve své současné podobě však dokáží zasáhnout pouze první dvě oblasti. Extrémní polarizace albánského politického systému spolu se slabou soudní mocí v praxi značně zeslabují účinky demokratizačních reforem protlačovaných EU. Přesměrování europeizačního úsilí směrem k podpoře rozvoje občanské společnosti by mohlo vytvořit požadovaný vnitřní tlak na pokrok v procesu demokratizace.

Klíčová slova

Mechanismy Europeizace, Evropské Normy, Demokratizace, Politický Konflikt,
Občanská Společnost

Abstract

The accession process of Albania into the European Union is defined by the gradual fulfilling of the Copenhagen criteria. With the aim of promoting democratization reforms in candidate countries and improvement in the Copenhagen political criteria, the European Union has exerted pressure into domestic political structures in Albania through a series of Europeanization Mechanisms. This dissertation uses qualitative analysis to examine the impact of the Europeanization Mechanisms in the democratization process of Albania after the signing of the Stabilization and Association agreement. The theoretical domain of the research falls within Europeanization and Quality Democracy theory. The data gathered in the form of document analysis and interviews serve to test the hypothesis of the direct relationship of Europeanization an input in democratization in the case of Albania. The results suggest that both the conception and practical application of the Europeanization mechanisms with regards to the democratization process are faced with a series of challenges. Democratization is a process that combines structures, policies, and norms. In their current formulation, Europeanization mechanisms are able to affect only the first two. In terms of practical application, extreme polarization of Albania's political system combined with a weak judiciary have greatly impaired the impact of EU conditionality in domestic democratization reforms. A redirection of Europeanization efforts towards the development of civil society could create the required internal pressure to push forward the process of democratization.

Keywords

Europeanization Mechanisms, European norms, Democratization, Political Conflict,

Civil Society

Statement:

1. This statement is to confirm that this paper is a product of my own work and also to confirm that I used the listed sources in producing it.

2. I agree that the paper can be checked for research and studying purposes.

Prague, 18 May 2012

Ergys Bruci

Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to my advisor, Mgr. Kamil Pikal, for his constant guidance throughout the entire dissertation process. His comments widely improved my academic proficiency.

I would also like to thank Dr. PhDr. Jiří Vykoukal, CSc, who patiently listened to the development of my ideas in our Master Thesis seminar. His constructive criticism brought clarity to my conception of Europeanization.

I am very appreciative of the financial support provided by the European Commission through the Erasmus Mundus Scholarship. With their help I was able to become part of a dynamic international student experience that improved both my academic and social skills.

Special thanks go to my friends who sat with me in classes, coffee shops and restaurants. Thank you Nigar Farajullayeva, Maria Chernyaeva, Chiara Casula, Megan Ouellette, Sander Maurano, Adam Gniazdowski, Ruben Rubinyan, and Paul Cleary for listening and encouraging me to keep going.

Finally, I am eternally grateful to my family. To my sister who still never complains when I ask her to proofread my works. To my parents who instilled in me a passion for knowledge.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	10
Methodology.....	13
Single Case Study.....	13
Qualitative methods.....	14
Sources.....	16
Theoretical Domain of Research.....	19
Europeanization Theory.....	19
Europeanization Degree.....	22
Europeanization Mechanisms	23
Democratization	26
Democratic Consolidation.....	27
Quality Democracy.....	28
From Europeanization to Democratization	31
Historical Background.....	34
Communist Legacy.....	34
The Bumpy Road toward EU Association	36
1992 – 1999 The Lost Chance.....	37
1999 – 2003 Moving toward SAA	41
2003 – 2006 Negotiating and Signing of the SAA	44
Europeanization at its Full Potential.....	48
The application of Europeanization Mechanisms	48
The European Model	49
Financial Aid.....	53
Twinning and Technical Assistance	58
Benchmarking and Monitoring	61
Gate – Keeping.....	64
Democratization Issues under the SAA	67
Local Elections of 2007	68
The Reforms of 2008.....	69
Parliamentary Elections and Boycott 2009 - 2010	73
Deaths at the Boulevard 2011	76
Quantified Democratization	78
Analysis and Conclusion	81
Bibliography	84

Introduction

On February 20th 1991 more than 100,000 protesters gathered in the Skanderbeg Square at the center of Tirana. Their target was one of the main symbols of the communist regime: the statue of the dictator Enver Hoxha. It took only one hour and the statue was down being dragged on Tirana's street by an old truck. The communist regime took its first hit. For the first time in fifty years people could call out "freedom, democracy". More than twenty years later Albania's road towards democracy is still ongoing and European integration is considered to be the way to reach it.

Europeanization and democratization are the most fashionable terms used today in Albania's political rhetoric. EU integration has been seen as one of the greatest incentives given to political actors to pursue democratization, with the understanding that the adoption of EU reforms would bring a free and stable democratic state. However, twenty years since the first contractual agreement with the EU, Albania finds itself only with the potential candidate status with still a long way to go in order to achieve full EU membership. In describing the democratization process in Albania, the Freedom House report of 2004 brings an interesting parallel with a Greek myth by stating that "Albanian democratization brings to mind the legend of Sisyphus: it is marked by periods of progress followed by serious setbacks that bring it repeatedly to the starting point." (Freedom House 2004)

In 2006, the EU and Albania ratified the commitment on both sides for Albania's European future with the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The EU presented a clear offer for membership and Albania took the responsibility to undertake the required reforms and achieve European standards in the shortest time possible. Reforms in the context of the economic criteria for membership have been rather successful. However, in terms

of reforms related to the political criteria and democratization, Albania has been lagging behind compared to other countries in the region. The EU integration process is considered to be a priority by all the political actors in Albania and surveys show that the great majority of Albanian population is Europhile but still the pace of reforms is quite slow. (Albanian Institute for International Studies 2011)

The democratization reforms in Albania have been affected by the EU accession process. Europeanization is a process by which the EU is able to disseminate its own model of structures, policies, and norms to domestic states through membership conditionality. There is a series of mechanisms that can be used by the EU as pressure on domestic reforms. These mechanisms include legislative templates, financial aid on the fields where reform is needed, benchmarking with other countries and continuous progress reports, advice from EU experts, and gate keeping to more advanced accession stages. This dissertation will analyze the impact of the EU accession process in the democratization process in Albania. The research questions that will be answered by our analysis are:

- How were the Europeanization mechanisms applied in Albania within the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU?
- Why were these mechanisms not effective in bringing advancement in the democratization of the country?

The results of this analysis will enable us to draw attention to the main challenges that prevent the positive impact of Europeanization in the democratization process in Albania and possible ways to prevent these challenges in the future.

Our research is tailored as a case study with the application of qualitative research methods. The tools used within qualitative methods were document analysis, interviews, and

surveys. Main sources included EU documentation on the Albania's association process, political statements and strategies from Albanian government and opposition, OSCE/ODHIR election reports, various NGO's publications, and media coverage.

In the theoretical background chapter we will include definition and traits of Europeanization and democratization as well as the theoretical framework behind their connection. We will use Radaelli's definition of Europeanization as a three staged process of construction, diffusion, institutionalization of structures, policies, and norms from the EU to domestic countries. (Radaelli 2000) Democratization will be understood as an increase in the quality of democracy according to Diamond and Morlino's conceptualization of the dimensions of Quality Democracy. (Diamond and Morlino 2005)

We will then go deep into the case study by presenting a historical background on Albania – EU relations. The chapter will include a section dedicated to the specific traits of the Albanian communist regime as an important factor in determining the norms and behavior of today Albanian political elite. Then we will proceed with an expose of Albania's integration efforts until the signing of the SAA.

The chapters that follow will include the empirical part of the dissertation. We will go into details on the application of Europeanization mechanisms in Albania since 2006, with a qualitative analysis of their effectiveness, pointing out which were the factors that limited their impact. A similar analysis will be done with the democratization process in Albania in order to find out the reasons behind the slow pace of reforms.

In the end we will summarize the main findings and present recommendations for the direction of future research.

Methodology

This chapter will present the methodological approach to our research. We will explain the reasoning behind the choice of a case study. Moreover, we will elucidate the advantages that qualitative methods present in the context our research questions. The last section of the chapter will include the list of sources where empirical data was gathered.

Single Case Study

The types of research questions presented in the dissertation greatly affect the type of methodology used by the researcher. (Bryman 1998) In analyzing the impact of the EU accession process in shaping democratization in the case of Albania, the method of choice is the single case study. A case study refers to researching a single unit. This unit can be “a spatially bounded phenomenon – e.g. a nation-state, revolution, political party, election, or person observed over a single point in time or over some delimited period of time” (Gerring, What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good for? 2004) In our research this unit is a country (Albania) and the delimited period of time is 2006 – 2012. Furthermore, Yin also points out that we do not only have the difference between single case and multiple cases researches, but also differences between within single case category itself. Firstly, single case researches can be holistic, where single units of analysis are used to provide in depth knowledge of a single case. Secondly, single case researches can be embedded, where multiple units of analysis are used to provide explanation for a single case. (Yin 1989) In our research the data is collected from a multitude of sources with various tools. Thus, our research is to be considered single case embedded.

A single case is intended to provide an in-depth knowledge on a specific unit or process analyzed. Sometimes, such an approach is more desirable than collecting data from a multitude

of cases with the aim of generalization of findings. (Gerring 2007) Our research's aim is not to generalize our findings to a broader number of cases but to examine thoroughly the process links between Europeanization and the transition to a liberal Democracy within the context of Albania. Therefore, Albania will be presented as a theory led case study where the causal linkage between the process of Europeanization and Democratization will be used in the paradigm of hypothesis testing. However, when looking at the effects of Europeanization and its results in Albania we cannot neglect the multiplicity of factors involved. Therefore, multicausality will be considered during this research in terms of impossibility of defining all the possible dynamics involved. B. Guy Peters advises us to accept such a complexity as an inescapable feature rather than disregarding this problem. (Guy 1998) Nevertheless, the most important aspects of both Europeanization and Democratization in Albania will be analyzed meticulously.

Qualitative methods

This dissertation will focus on two processes: Europeanization and Democratization. Also, we will describe in details the linkage between them pointing out causality paths. Both processes are highly affected by the societal context they evolve in. Therefore, qualitative methods provide us with the best tools in understanding and providing answers to our over mentioned research questions. Bryman points out the differences between Qualitative and Quantitative approaches of research:

Quantitative	Qualitative
Numbers	Words
Static	Process
Structure	Unstructured
Generalization	Conceptual Understanding
Hard reliable data	Deep – Rich data
Behavior	Meaning

(Bryman 2001, 285)

Looking at this table we can comprehend why Qualitative methods are more suitable for our analysis. Both Europeanization and Democratization are processes. We cannot understand them as fully static. These processes can be understood in terms of actions and decisions of actors involved as well as the impact of these decisions. Hence, words rather than numbers will help us understand such developments. Finally, the aim of this dissertation is to uncover the functioning of these two processes within the Albanian society. We will then present recommendations on desired paths to follow. However, we have to keep in mind that the aim of collecting our data is not dedicated to clear forecasting purposes. Meaning of actor's actions and their impact in Europeanization and Democratization developments will be the center of our attention rather than predictions on actors' future behavior. Looking at all of these arguments, we can say that Qualitative methods are best suited to our research purposes.

During our research we have to be aware of both advantages and disadvantages of our chosen research method. Possibly the main criticism given to Qualitative methods is bias in the data which is then linked to the generalization issue. Biased data taken out of a specific context cannot be practically compared and therefore generalization cannot be attained. However, this disadvantage is greatly outweighed by the ability of qualitative methods to explore practices,

attitudes, and experiences that lead to comprehensive understanding of a particular context. (Marsh and Stoker 2002) Moreover, in order to disarm the possible methodology criticisms, in our research we include also some quantitative data in the form of tables, graphs, and indexes. These quantitative data are added to the qualitative research using the logic of development (Greene, Caracelli and Graham 1989). In this logic the quantitative data gathered is used to inform further analysis in the qualitative research. Hence, economic aspects of Europeanization, international indexes on democratic development, and graphs of perceptions toward the EU are presented in order to add more information to our qualitative analysis of process developments and causality.

Sources

The types of tools that can be used within the domain of a qualitative analysis that uses the logic of development are various and rather useful. The tools at our disposal are:

- Documentary Analysis
- Direct Observation
- Participant Observation
- Interviewing
- Surveys

During our research we try to combine the best possible model of research bearing in mind the advantages and disadvantages of each of the over mentioned tools and also practical financial and time constrains of the researcher. Therefore, our research is focused on documentary analysis, interviews with key stakeholders, and surveys.

In preparing the theoretical framework we use secondary research on academic literature and journal scholarly articles on the two processes of Europeanization and Democratization. This part of the research helps us define the two processes in order to better see their actual application in the case of Albania. Furthermore, we examine similar works in other Western Balkan countries that have undergone and are undergoing through similar processes. Although this is not a comparative study, mentioning data from other countries would in fact make our case more interesting. Eventually, even a single case can be comparative through use of comparative contextualization. (Yengoyan 2006)

The core of our research comes from the analysis of documentation between Albania and EU. Here we can mention: agreements and memoranda between Albania and EU, EU commission progress report on Albania advancement in the EU accession process, EU commission opinions on Albania, EU Enlargement strategies toward the Western Balkans, Instrument for Pre Accession Aid reports, publications and press releases from the EU delegation in Albania.

Moreover, data is also gathered from other international institutions present in Albania whose work is closely related with the democratization process. Here we find reports of OSCE and ODHIR on the functioning of the rule of law and election processes.

The Albanian government and opposition are both included in the source selection process through political statements, strategies, and action plans. An imperative tool within this section is the use of two semi-structured interviews with an official from the Ministry of European Integration and also a member of the Commission of European Integration of the Parliament of Albania. In order to eliminate the political bias factor, the interviewees represent both sides of the political spectrum. The decision to make semi structured interviews rather than

structured ones is inevitably linked with the research aims. Semi structured interviews are more suitable in providing natural perceptions, attitudes, and opinions rather than straight forward political statements.

The governmental and political party position cannot supply us with an encompassing view of the political situation in Albania. Hence, our pool of sources is extended to the nongovernmental sector. Here we can mention, the Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS) and its extensive decennial project and surveys on perception of Albanians towards the EU. The well functioning and development of civil society is analyzed through data from the Institute for Democracy and Mediation. European movement of Albania is called into play through its monitoring of the EU allocation of funds and qualitative assessments of the IPA programme. The research is then extended on democratization where data from the Agenda Institute and the Albanian Helsinki Committee and their report of the good governance and European integration are to be considered.

Scholarly articles from Albanian and international academics on the topics of European integration and Democratization are also analyzed. The researcher speaks both English and Albanian fluently, thus language barriers are not to be considered as a problem.

The final important set of sources includes the media. In this context, data is gathered from important Albanian magazines and monthly publications from the European University in Tirana. Academic journals such as Polis and magazines present us with views from all stakeholders in Albania's Europeanization and Democratization process.

Theoretical Domain of Research

In this chapter we will introduce the main theories in which our research is based on. We will start by conceptualizing the Europeanization process and then move to degree in which Europeanization affects domestic states. Next, we will present the Europeanization Mechanisms as pressure tools in the hand of the EU. In the second part of this chapter we will present democratization theory. We will focus mainly on the conceptions of democratic consolidation and Quality Democracy. In the final section we will introduce the theoretical linkage between Europeanization and democratization.

Europeanization Theory

Conceptualizing Europeanization process in the case of Albania presents its own area of inquiry. In fact, Europeanization has become rather fashionable in the field of European Studies. There is substantial discussion on whether to consider Europeanization as a part of international relations or policy analysis. (Kohler-Koch 2002) In our research, the aim is to achieve a greater understanding of the impact of EU accession process on a domestic process such as democratization. The level of analysis will be unitary – where the unit is the domestic country. Therefore, our research will consider Europeanization in the policy analysis paradigm.

Another important distinction to make is between the types of actors involved in this given process. Europeanization in fact is a process that continues even after a country joins the EU. However, the dynamics of EU impact on member countries are considerably different than those on potential candidate and candidate countries. Vachudova recognizes this difference in her notion of asymmetric interdependence. (Vachudova 2006) In her conception, EU is able to exert quite a lot of pressure in the forms of “sticks and carrots” to countries that undergo through the accession process. In essence, bargaining power remains in the hands of EU. However, when

these countries do fulfill accession criteria and become full members of the EU, rules change. After membership status is achieved, member countries besides importing norms and regulations from the EU are also quite powerful in transmitting their own norms to the EU itself. Our research and the time span of analysis will consider only the period when Albania is a potential candidate and thus asymmetrically interdependent to the EU.

Albania's own political context and discourse presents another factor in defining Europeanization. In fact, this term in Albania has a dichotomous meaning of both a process and a strategic goal. A common practice in political discourse and media is to equal Europeanization with EU membership. Thus, this misperception is transcribed: joining the EU means being Europeanized. Bearing in mind all of the different conceptualization of this idiom and analyzing all the different classifications, we have come to the conclusion that the most suitable definition for Europeanization in this research is the one presented by Claudio Radaelli that states as follows:

“Europeanization consists of processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and sub national) discourse, identities, political structures and public policies.” (Radealli 2000, 7)

This highly detailed definition provides us with the possibility to attain valuable insights on the impact of the EU in domestic countries. Bearing in mind the focus of this research, we will consider only the stages (b) *diffusion* and (c) *institutionalization*. The stage (a) *construction* occurs exclusively at EU level, thus current potential candidate and candidate countries have no practical input on such a process. On the other hand, diffusion and institutionalization are processes that involve both the EU and domestic countries.

Empirical analysis of such Europeanization as a concept is now an easy task. However, Radaelli creates a very useful classification by raising different question:

- What is being Europeanized?
- To what Extent?
- How?

(Radaelli 2003)

The first question “What” relates to the field where Europeanization effects occur. The “Extent” refers to the degree of change in the direction promoted by the EU. “How” refers to the mechanism by which this change is promoted to the domestic countries. Answering these questions will provide us with a productive theoretical conceptual model which then can be applied to our case.

What is being Europeanized? Some of the areas where Europeanization is felt are provided in the Radaelli’s definition but we can divide them into three different categories:

- Domestic structures: institutions, legal structures, political parties, public administration
- Public policy
- Cognitive and normative structures: discourses, norms, values, identities, narratives.

(Sandrin 2010)

Grabbe here recognizes the difference between “hard transfers” and “soft transfers”. In her view, hard transfers can be considered the process by which the EU conveys to domestic countries rules, procedures, and policy paradigms. On the other hand, soft transfers are concerned with the transmission of norms and shared beliefs. (Grabbe 2006) Linked with the classification above, areas where hard transfers can be exerted are domestic structure and public policy. On the other hand, soft transfers can be applied to the areas of cognitive and normative

structures. Although both Radaelli and Grabbe decide not to extend their analysis to discourses, norms, and values, the importance of such soft transfers has become progressively more apparent. (Sedelmeier 2001)

Europeanization Degree

The degree of EU transformative power fluctuates rather highly when looking at different countries. The dynamics of such an impact are highly dependent on the domestic context of the member, candidate, or potential candidate country. This is true for both hard and soft transfers. Cowles points out that domestic configuration are imperative in determining dissemination of European values and principles. (Cowles, Risse and Caporaso 2001) Europeanization literature present us with five different measures of EU-led reform acceptance: Retrenchment, Inertia, Absorption, Accommodation, and Transformation. (Börzel and Risse 2003)

Retrenchment involves a so called negative Europeanization. As Radaelli proposes, in this case a country becomes less “European” than it was. (Radealli 2000) In this context, the policies and ideas adopted by the domestic country are in opposition with those promoted by the EU. The degree of change in this case is negative. Inertia stands for absence of change in domestic policies. This may happen due to the fact that countries perceive that models, norms, and policies put forward by the EU as not adherent to their domestic systems. The symptoms of inertia are delays in transposition of EU regulations and directives as well as continuous resistance towards EU reforms. (Radealli 2000) The next stage on this continuum is absorption. This is the first stage where candidate or member countries actually start adopting EU policies and norms into domestic programs. However, this change does not considerably transform the existing domestic policies and structures (Börzel and Risse 2003) Hence, the degree of change still remains low. The degree of change increases in the stage of accommodation. EU promoted

policies and institutions are included into existing ones without changing the entire former structure. (Héritier 2001) This way candidate and member states are able to adapt their domestic procedures and institutions without remodeling their essential features. (Börzel and Risse 2003) Thus, the degree of change remains rather modest. Transformation involves thorough changes in domestic structures. Existing policies and institutions are replaced by significantly new and different ones. As Börzel and Risse assert, the underlying collective understanding on the functioning of these institutions and policies radically changes. (Börzel and Risse 2003) In this stage the degree of domestic change reaches the highest level.

Europeanization Mechanisms

After presenting our choice in conceptual models on the areas that Europeanization affects and also the conception on degree of change in domestic countries, it is time to introduce the Europeanization Mechanisms. By these mechanisms we will understand the tools available at the European level that can be used to push for change in domestic countries. Heather Grabbe in her effort to empirically explain the transformative power of the EU in domestic countries presents us with one of the most comprehensive listings of mechanisms. According to Grabbe the tools in the hands of the EU are:

- *Models*: provision of legislative and institutional templates
- *Money*: aid and technical assistance
- *Benchmarking and monitoring*
- *Advice and twinning*
- *Gate-keeping*: access to negotiations and further stages in the accession process

(Grabbe 2006)

The mechanism *Models* concerns with the transposition of laws and regulations listed in the highly detailed *acquis communautaire*. Such a mechanism insures that no conflict exists between procedures in domestic countries and at the European level. The European *Model*, as a mechanism, applies pressure before and during the accession process. In previous waves of European enlargement, candidate countries engaged in anticipatory adjustments or adoption of EU legal practices even before the EU actually required them. (Grabbe 2006) However, there is concordance that this mechanism reaches his highest impact during the accession process.

Money as a mechanism in the process of Europeanization is related to the financial aid provided by the EU directed at improving both institutional capacities and infrastructural projects. This mechanism provides an important “carrot” by ensuring development of specific fields or areas of interest through monetary support. Albania has been receiving this monetary support since 1991 through different programs such as PHARE, CARDS, and lately the pre accession aid program IPA. (Ministry of Integration 2010) An important aspect of IPA is its direct relation with the admission criteria. Thus, IPA is analyzed thoroughly in the following chapters because it provides insightful information of Europeanization’s degree of impact.

Benchmarking and *Monitoring* concerns with ranking candidate and potential candidate countries in terms of their advancement in the accession process and, more importantly, continuous overseeing of this process through country progress reports. Comparing countries undergoing the same changes is thought to promote competition and thus advancement in fulfilling accession criteria. Moreover, progress reports allow EU delegations in candidate and potential candidate countries to analyze performance at the ministry and also specific policy level. (Grabbe 2006) Hence, clear recommendations on which areas advancement is needed can be easily provided.

The domain of *Advice* and *Twinning* includes the multitude of experts from European institution that reside in candidate countries and help in creating democratic institutions and market oriented structures aimed at fulfilling the EU accession requirements. These experts are involved in series of training, workshops, conferences on a wide range of topics that vary from highly technical projects to more socially complex ones.

Last but definitely not least we find the Gate-keeping mechanism. The EU has laid out the conditions for accession rather broadly since 1993 with the Copenhagen Criteria. However, later development on the conception of the accession process brought up a series of stages a country has to pass in order to become a full EU member and the EU can apply the Gate-keeping function at each of this steps. (Scimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005) Thus, today we have the stages of potential candidate, candidate, and member country.

The over mentioned Europeanization mechanisms (although including a wide range of tools) can only be applied to the areas of domestic structures and public policies. (Grabbe 2006) Hence, the impact on cognitive and normative structures has to be analyzed within another conceptual model. March and Olsen provide a two way answer to the adaptation process of domestic countries in terms of norms, identities, and interests. Europeanization can exert its impact in these fields through the logic of consequentialism and the logic of appropriateness. The logic of consequentialism proposes that institutions can change the behavior of specific actors through a combination of opportunities and constraints. (March and Olsen 1998) Within this logic, Europeanization empowers actors differently at the domestic level thus providing opportunities for domestic redistribution of power. (Börzel and Risse 2003) Actors therefore can find advantages against their domestic rivals by adopting EU promoted norms. On the other hand, the logic of appropriateness suggests that institutions shape actors behavior due to the fact

that actors internalize institutional norms and create compatible identities. (March and Olsen 1998) In the Europeanization context, domestic countries undergo a socialization process where debating with EU institutions, persuasion by advocacy networks, and social learning redefine their own behavior and identity. These two processes are not mutually exclusive. They can happen at the same time involving different actors within the domestic country. (Börzel and Risse 2003) Both these logic will help us understand Europeanization's impact on the cognitive and normative structures in Albania.

Democratization

Democracy is considered to be one of the oldest conceptions of government whereas the study of democratization process is a rather recent trend. Democratization process concerns with how non democratic regimes are turned into democratic ones, under which conditions they consolidate into strong democracies, and how they could backlash towards authoritarian control. Huntington presents an interesting historical perspective on how the democratization process evolved. In his conception democratization occurs in "waves." By waves we understand period of time where the group of transitions from non democratic to democratic regimes exceeds by far the transitions in the opposite direction. (Huntington 1991) Analyzing democratization in this conceptual model Huntington proposes three distinct waves. The first one has its beginnings in the American and French revolutions. From 1848 to 1926, there were 33 countries where democratization was applied, whereas none moved toward a non democratic form of government. (Huntington 1991) However, expansion of Nazi and Fascist ideologies in the second part of the 1920s brought a wave on the opposite direction. By the year 1942, nearly 20 percent of all the nations of the world had fallen back to authoritarian regimes. (Kurzman 1998) The second wave of democratization started in the second part of the 1940s and its main drivers

were the defeat Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany at the end of World War II as well as a large number of transitions towards democracy in Latin American countries. (Huntington 1991) However, Latin American didn't cope well with the new democratic regimes and fell back towards authoritative and dictatorial systems. The coming about of democratic regimes in Portugal in 1974 together with the later democratic transitions in Greece and Spain present the starting point of the third wave of democratization.

Huntington includes in this wave also the breakup of the Soviet Union and the democratic reforms in central and eastern European countries. However, McFaul challenges that perception by arguing that transitions from communist regimes toward democratic ones present essential differences such as the role of masses. According to McFaul, whereas the third wave highlights the role of elites in promoting democratization, in the case of transition from communist regimes this role is complemented by mass actors. (McFaul 2002) The studies of Huntington and his critics agree on the conceptions of waves. Thus, we can understand that when democracies appear they are still in danger of backsliding into authoritative systems. O' Donnell asserts that one way or another, democracies always find themselves in a kind of crisis. (O'Donnell 2007) The wave explanation merely scratches the surface on the reasons behind this democratic fragility. Therefore, democracy is a goal that requires effort not only in attaining it but most importantly in securing it. Following the same train of thought, scholars in the field of democratization have moved their attention towards democratic consolidation.

Democratic Consolidation

Democratic consolidation concerns with the life expectancy of a democracy. O' Donnell would provide the more classical definition of democratic consolidation when it talks about democracies that are likely to endure. (O'Donnell 1996) Although quite straight forward, this

definition is widely open to criticism in terms of making the concept operational. Further elaborations present democratic consolidation as increase in the adoption of democratic and liberal values in the mindset of the people (Linz and Stepan 1996) Haerpfer would expand even more by connecting democratic consolidation with the presence of what he calls democratic criteria: rule of law, democratic constitution, separation of powers, independent civil society, a, political pluralism, respect of human, and political rights, and freedom of media and political association. (Haerpfer 2009)The logic behind these conceptions of democratic consolidation is that of avoiding the backlash to authoritative regimes. Hence, when cases are studied in the domain of democratic consolidation, the aim is to find possible symptoms that may reduce a democracy's likeliness to endure. The criteria in Haerpfer's list are shown as conditions that if not present lead to short democratic life expectancy. Moreover, consolidation as a condition is analyzed from the "external observer" point of view rather than the "internal participant" one. (Schedler 2001) Presence of the criteria is examined from an expert position instead of expectations of local political actors and citizens. Democratic consolidation can provide insightful answers about the dangers that are posed to a democracy. For a more detailed conceptual model on the actual situation of the democratization process in Albania, this dissertation will rely more on the concept of Quality Democracy.

Quality Democracy

Diamond and Morlino in trying to assess the quality of democracy present an encompassing framework consisting of not only "procedural" dimensions but most importantly "substantive" ones. In this framework quality is understood in terms of procedure, content, and result. (Diamond and Morlino 2005) Following this train of thought we are presented with eight distinct dimensions where democracies differentiate in quality.

The first four are concerned with the procedural aspect of quality. In this category we have, rule of law, participation, competition, vertical accountability, and horizontal accountability. The rule of law is highly dependent on the independence of the judiciary system. Laws have to be clear, available to all the citizens, and of a non-retroactive nature. Thus, democracies can be considered to be of a good quality only when all citizens of a studied country are in fact equal before the law. (O'Donnell 2005) Participation concerns with the involvement of all groups of the society in the decision making process. Diamond and Morlino point out that there is a high correlation between participation and political equality also stressing the importance of society's education on the political system they live under and their democratic rights. (Diamond and Morlino 2005, xvi) Competition involves the presence of at least more than one relevant political parties and the fairness of their electoral process. This dimension also involved equality in the access for electoral campaign founding and in the use of mass media. However, an important aspect that constrains competition is the partisan control of electoral committees. (Diamond and Morlino 2005, xviii) The concept of accountability here is divided into vertical and horizontal aspects. Vertical accountability entails the obligations that political actors have towards their voters. Democracies of a good quality are those in which political actors are able and willing to inform their electors about the decisions they make and also take responsibility for the outcomes of those decisions. Horizontal accountability involves the responsibility of political actors to inform and reply to questions from other actors of the same level or political equals. (Diamond and Morlino 2005, xxi) Here we can mention the relations between political and government actors, parliamentary commissions, government control agencies, and constitutional courts.

Substantive dimensions of democratic quality are freedom and equality. In Dahl's conception freedom is composed of three main categories of rights that a citizen must have: political rights, civil rights, and socioeconomic rights. (Dahl 1971) Considering the political perspective, citizens should be free to vote, create political organizations, stand for office, and campaign. Civil rights on the other hand are concerned with the freedom of thought, expression, information, freedom of assembly, and right to a due process. Lastly, socioeconomic rights involve rights on property, entrepreneurship, and employment. (Beetham 1994)

The second substantive dimension is equality. Equality can be achieved when every citizen is able to have the same rights and legal protection. A derivation from this definition is that equality can be understood by the lack of discrimination in terms of gender, race, religion, and political orientation. (Diamond and Morlino 2005, xxvii) For the purpose of this dissertation we will focus on political equality. However, the ability to implement political equality at its full is quite difficult. Differences within society in terms of education and economic level provide the conditions where individuals with higher understanding of the political system and higher resources are able to exert more political pressure. (Reuschmeyer 2005)

Democratization cannot be achieved without progress in both procedural and substantive dimensions. Substantive dimensions have the power to alter the degree of quality in procedural dimensions of democracy. Thus, rule of law, participation, competition, and accountability would lose their impact on democracy when freedom and equality are not present. The eighth dimension tries to provide a link between procedural and substantive dimensions. The dimension of responsiveness concerns with how the government is able to respond to both demands and expectations of its citizens. (Diamond and Morlino 2005, xxix) If a government is able to provide freedom and equality as well as attain high scores in all the procedural dimensions, that

government can be considered responsive. The presence of a responsive government is an indication of high quality of democracy. (Powell 2005) Following the other path, where freedom and equality are not respected but procedural dimensions of quality democracy are present to some extent, we find the creation of what Vachudova calls illiberal democratic regimes. (Vachudova 2006) In illiberal democratic regimes we do have institutions in place that assure the balance of power and also regular elections. However, political actors coming out of these elections do not respect both rule of law and separation of powers, thus political rights of citizens are impaired. . (Vachudova 2006)

When we analyze the democratization process in our case, Albania will be presented as a case of the third wave of democratization with a twist, bearing in mind the country's communist and isolated past. To understand democratization developments we will apply both procedural and substantial dimensions of democratic quality to Albania's case. We will show how the disparity in these dimensions brought to the advancement in democratization to a halt making us question whether Albania should be considered a country undergoing democratic consolidation or democratic standstill. In the next session we will present the theoretical background on the linkage between Europeanization and democratization.

From Europeanization to Democratization

In 1993 the European Council following on the regime changes in Central and Eastern Europe and expecting application for membership status presented the set of criteria a country has to fulfill in order to become a full member. These are known as the Copenhagen criteria and they state as follows:

1. The achievement of stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection o minorities (political criterion);

2. The existence of a functioning market economy, as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union (economic criterion);
3. The ability to take on the obligations of membership, that is to adopt the common rules, standards and policies that make up the body of EU law, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union (acquis criterion) (European Council, 1993)

Romano Prodi, during his presidency of the European Commission, stated that every country that resides in Europe, respect the over mentioned criteria, and fulfills the necessary reforms will become a member of the EU. (Prodi 2002) The political criterion stresses out that countries that have the intention of joining EU must have a democratic regime. In fact, putting the political criterion as a precondition for countries that undergo through EU accession process is actually pushing for democratization reforms. (Keyman and A 2006) Pridham analyzed the influence of European integration in democratization reforms. In his view, EU impact is felt in both structural as well as normative levels, consisting of political structures as well as elite attitudes, civil society, and public perceptions. (Pridham 2001) The previous wave of enlargement in CEE countries is considered by some scholars to be a proof of that. Vachudova push this idea even forward considering EU impact in CEE countries as “the most successful democracy promotion program ever implemented by an international actor.” (Vachudova 2006, 2) In the case of Western Balkans the Copenhagen criteria have evolved even more to the highly complex Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA). Focusing more on this region, we find that Europeanization process is a major initiator of developments through providing models of government, financial assistance, and setting admission criteria. (Anastasakis 2001)

The theoretical framework presented in this chapter will be applied to Albania’s case. Through the analysis of the practical application of Europeanization mechanisms we will put to

test the linkage between the processes Europeanization and democratization by presenting both democratic promotion efforts as well as practical constrains.

Historical Background

With this chapter we will start the part of the dissertation that focuses entirely on the case of Albania. We will present the main traits of the heritage from the communist regime in Albania as a factor in determining the actions of the political elite. In the subsequent part we will describe the EU – Albania relations until the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement.

Communist Legacy

In order to understand the EU impacts on domestic democratization of the Albanian political system it is imperative to take into account the origins of such a system in relation to its communist experience. In Albania we can see a rather distinct application of communist ideology, the implications of which have affected traits of the first democratic governments in the 1990s, as well as norms and behavior of political actors.

The single most important trait of Albania's communist heritage is the complete isolation from the rest of the world from the 1970s until the fall of the regime. This isolation includes also other Eastern Bloc countries. In the early post-World War II developments, Albania broke relations with the neighboring state of Yugoslavia. The next stage in isolation was breaking up relations with the Soviet Union in the early 60s and the concentration on the last possible but quite bizarre ally: communist China. However, this political and economic relationship didn't last long and within a decade the Albanian-Chinese brotherhood ended leaving Albania in the form of a "capsule" completely isolated from world developments. This type of isolation could only be achieved by another of the traits of Albanian communism: the propaganda and induced paranoia of the outside enemies. Thus, international isolation and other political and economic difficulties were justified by the patriotic duty to defend against possible invaders. Furthermore,

this communist system could only be maintained by the physical elimination of any kind of liberal political elite that included western educated Albanians. Hence, in the beginning of the 1990s Albania, in comparison with other Central and East European countries, did not have a skilled liberal elite that could push forward the transition to a democratic state. Another key difference is the extremity of the totalitarian regime where every aspect of the country's life was directed by the communist elite. This totalitarian nature in Albania went as far as abolishing all religious institutions in the 1960s so that communism would be the only and supreme ideology. Moreover, political persecution was applied throughout the entire period of communist rule. This persecution was not confined to individuals but also to their families and relatives. The result of such policies was a divided society of persecution perpetrators and victims.

The above mentioned traits of the Albanian communist regime brought a series of implications into the early stages of transition to a democratic form of government. In fact, collapse of the communist system has been one of the most difficult periods of time in Albania's history. It was not just a political crisis but also an economical and social one. In the beginning of the 1990s Albanian economy was almost totally dependent on foreign aid. (Zanga 1992) However, another important aspect of communist collapse was the loss of trust in the state institutions and decline in national pride. Whereas in other countries in the region communist collapse was followed by nationalistic movements, in Albania the 50 years of using nationalism as propaganda against outside enemies lowered its impact in society. Albanians became in fact nationalistically indifferent. (Kadare 1995) Moreover, the void left by a fifty year hardened communist idea of collective goods was filled by a limitless type of individualism. State institutions were not strong enough to put clear boundaries to what belonged to the individual and what belonged to the society. Hence, public goods became the victim of the new conceptions

of freedom and individualism in Albania. Furthermore, social divisions already initiated during communist rule presented themselves in the first phases of transition. Although there was not a movement for revenge against former communist activists, there was a clear division in terms of considerations of the former regime. Supporters of the communist regime became the base of the newly reformed Socialist Party whereas the Democratic Party gathered support in those social groups that were opposing communist rule. Even though the difference in terms of pro and anti communist dissolved in the following years, they left in a mark in the highly antagonist nature of the political climate in Albania. In addition, another negative implication of Albanian communist legacy is the identification of party with the state. Thus, in the first phases of transition the Albanian democratic governments followed somewhat the same logic by filling the state apparatus with party militants after every election.

The singular type of communist legacy brought in the early 1990s an Albanian society where low nationalistic pride was followed by unlimited individualism and, most importantly, a confrontational character of domestic politics. (Kajsiu, Bumçi and Rakipi 2003) This was the context in which the newly democratic Albanian government took the first step of interaction with the EU (at that time European Community).

The Bumpy Road toward EU Association

It has been already twenty years since the first contractual agreement between Albania and European organizations. However, Albania's journey towards EU accession was characterized by periods of advancement followed by stagnation and regression in reforms. Regardless of this slow tempo in pushing forward EU integration, Albania's population still remains highly Europhile and all political forces agree on EU integration as the only possible choice in Albania's future. Although the rhetorical expression "Return to Europe" has been used

by all political forces since 1992, there has been a lack in political commitment to implement the required reforms thus delaying democratic consolidation, economic development, and EU integration. (Vurmo 2008) In this section we will analyze the key aspects of Albania-EU political developments focusing on milestones in EU integration process. This analysis will provide an encompassing view of the conditions that led to the full application of the Europeanization mechanisms in the democratization process in Albania. The time line for this section will be divided into three parts:

- 1992 – 1999 Albania – EU relations before the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA)
- 1999 – 2003 Moving toward SAA
- 2003 – 2006 Negotiating and Signing of the SAA

Each of these phases presents interesting characteristics in Albania's domestic political developments as well as EU's regional approach towards the Western Balkans and bilateral approach with Albania.

1992 – 1999 The Lost Chance

Albania first contacts with the European Community were established immediately after the fall of the communist regime. The focus of the first interaction was immediate aid for food supplies and then funds for infrastructure. The European community included Albania in the PHARE program which was initially created to help the economic and institutional transition in CEE countries. Thus, in the first years of transition precisely in the period 1991 – 1997 Albania received funds for food emergency supplies and renovation of infrastructure that amounted to 318 million Euros. (Hoffmann 2005) In terms of contractual

agreement the first relation was established at the end of 1992 with the signing of the “Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Republic of Albania, on trade and commercial and economic cooperation”. (European Commission 1992) This agreement regulated both trade and other economic aspects of the European Economic Community involvement in Albania but also represents the first step of a closer political relationship. In fact, this agreement is the first written document when the possibility of future association into European political structures subject to conditionality is mentioned. Whereas trade conditions are clearly set out, the European community had also the belief that “a further impetus should be given to the trading and economic relationship between the Community and Albania by establishing contractual links which will contribute to progress towards the objective of an association in due course, when conditions are met.” (European Commission 1992)

This document also shows Albania’s commitment to create and strengthen democratic institutions and the European Community’s stand that these institutions should operate according to the principles stated in the Helsinki Final Act, the documents from the Madrid, Vienna, and Copenhagen meeting, and the Charter of Paris. All these principles are particularly related to rule of law, democracy, and human rights. Moreover, in compliance with this agreement we have the creation of a Joint Committee with members from both Albania and the European Community with the aim of directing both social and economic policies in accordance to the over mentioned principles (European Commission 1992). Therefore, at the very early stages of transition to a democratic system, Albania found in the European Community a partner not only willing to provide economic aid and trade partnership but also favorable toward the idea of future accession.

However, what the 1992 agreement lacked was a clear definition of what were the “conditions” to be met for the accession objective. Thus, it is not possible to talk about Europeanization at this point for it lacks a concrete definition on its supply side. Albania was not formally asked to comply with European legislation and norms. Even the financial aid received by the EU through the PHARE program cannot be considered as a mechanism of Europeanization. The Albanian political elite was not able to identify clear incentives offered by the prospect of European integration. Hence, at the first years of transition Albania was left alone in finding the way forward in the democratization process which translated into inevitably little achievements in increasing democratic quality.

The breakdown of Yugoslavia had a sensible impact on EU’s regional approach toward the Western Balkans and especially bilateral approach towards Albania. Trying to differentiate themselves from other Balkan countries and gain from the “good behavior” shown during the conflicts in Yugoslavia, the Albanian government decided to submit in 1995 a request for opening negotiations for an association agreement with the EU. This request was envisaged in the same format of the Europe Agreements between EU and CEE countries. Although the format of the request was not accepted in June 1995, optimism for an enhancement of the relations still persisted. In May 1996, the General Affair Council requested from the EU commission to submit drafts of a new agreement tailored for Albania that would serve as advancement in the association process. This agreement would not go as far as offer full EU membership possibility but would put Albania on a higher level than Yugoslav countries (except Slovenia) in relation to the EU. (Vurmo 2008) Although this agreement presents a development in the contractual relationships, we still cannot talk about application of the Europeanization process. In fact, we still have the absence of the major “carrot” of this process (clear offer of EU membership) and

Albania's European future would still remain quite vague even with enhancement of relations with the EU.

The prospect of stronger ties with the EU disappeared in a matter of weeks due to the organization of parliamentary elections in Albania. In fact, the course of these elections showed to international observers how little gains Albania had achieved in terms of democratization. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) was charged by OSCE to monitor the pre-election and voting process according to Albanian electoral law and also European standards. The results presented in their report were obviously dim. In regard to the Albanian election law, 32 articles out of 79 were clearly violated. (OSCE 1996) Some of the major violations included opposition parties not being able to ensure permit for campaign rallies, intimidation by the police on Election Day, and inconsistencies between the number of ballots in the ballot boxes and signatures on the voter register.

In regards to European democratic standards, we have to mention that Albania was a participant in the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) in 1990. In this conference, participant states agreed to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms based on political pluralism and democracy. Paragraph 7 of this document concerns with election and how the "will of the people" should be the basis of government representation. During the parliamentary elections in Albania in 1996, 5 out of 9 articles under paragraph 7 were violated including the rights of citizens to run for public office, the right to open political organizations, the absence of intimidation of political adversaries, the right to have equal access to media, and the right to honest counting of votes. (OSCE 1996)

If the elections of 1996 served to dissolve the existing EU integration optimism, the breakdown of the financial pyramid schemes and social unrest that followed served to create

pessimism on the future prospects of Albania's integration into EU structures. By March 1997, the pyramid schemes, which had operated in Albania for almost two years by offering incredible up to 19% returns per month, declared bankruptcy taking away a large portion of the population savings. (Jarvis 2000) In the social unrest that followed, the government lost control of entire regions to criminal gangs and was forced to resign. New elections were hastily organized and the opposition took control of the government calming the riots and re-stabilizing to some extent the political situation. (Tripodi 2002) However, lack of governmental control on the financial system operating in the country linked with instability of democratic institutions forced the EU to reconsider its position in terms of Albania integration prospects. The European Commission presented in 1999 a report on the feasibility of negotiating a SAA with Albania. The observations of the European Commission indicated that although advancement were made in terms of creating political structures that promoted the separation of power, reforms in public administration were undertaken at a slow pace. Moreover, Albania was tainted by widespread crime, corruption, as well as instable political institutions. (European Commission 1999) Hence, the European Commission did not envisage a new agreement for Albania but required progress in the current one (European Commission 1999) Albania had de facto lost the opportunity to be the first country in the region to get closer to the EU.

1999 – 2003 Moving toward SAA

In the year 1999, the EU finally decided to offer to Western Balkan countries a clear prospect for accession by shifting the nature of bilateral agreement with Western Balkan countries from co-operation agreements to Stabilisation and Association Agreements. Accordingly, the Stabilisation and Association Process for Western Balkan countries was put on the table of negotiations. The Feira European Council held in June 2000 reinforced such an offer.

During its proceeding it was mentioned that all Western Balkan countries could now be considered as potential candidate countries for EU membership. (European Parliament 2000) This commitment was executed in the Zagreb Summit in November 2000 where the EU reaffirmed the European perspective for Western Balkan countries in compliance with the conclusions made in Feira. Both these summits are highly important in terms of Europeanization. The final declaration of the Zagreb Summit provided all Western Balkan countries with a clear offer for EU membership. Moreover, the conditionality of such an offer was understood in terms of the Copenhagen criteria and the SAA agreements would serve as mechanisms to fulfill it. The declaration states that:

“The prospect of accession is offered on the basis of the provision of the Treaty on European Union, respect for the criteria defined at the Copenhagen European Council in June 1993 and the progress made in implementing the stabilisation and association agreements, in particular on regional cooperation.” (European Commission 2000)

The Zagreb Summit put some countries in a better light than others. Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in fact were considered to be ready to open negotiations immediately for the SAA. Albania was unable to capitalize in this summit like neighboring countries. The crises of 1997 was still fresh in the eyes of the EU and the feasibility report on opening the negotiation presented in 1999 clearly pointed out the slow pace of reforms. However, the EU provided another “carrot” in order to push for reforms in Albania through the creation of an EU – Albania High Level Steering Group (HLSG). The principal aim for the creation of this group was to start a new assessment of Albania’s capabilities in terms of being able to withstand the requirements of the SAA. (European Commission 2000) The HLSG presented its report to the Council in June 2001. While presenting an expose of the advancement in reforms and current problems the final conclusion was generally positive:

“Taking all of these factors into account, the Commission considers that Albania is not yet in the position to meet the obligations of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement. However, if the current pace of change is sustained and if sufficient priority is given to strengthening administrative capacity during the negotiating and transition periods, considerable improvements can be made in the areas highlighted in this report. The Commission believes that the perspective of opening Stabilisation and Association Agreement negotiations is 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. The Commission therefore considers it appropriate to proceed with a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Albania, and it will in due course submit a recommendation for a Council decision to open negotiations, which can, of course, only be concluded when all appropriate conditions have been met.” (European Commission 2001)

It was clear that Albania had not fulfilled the standards required by the EU. The decision presented by the European Commission to proceed with the SAA was mainly a political incentive to domestic factors which in the period 1999 – 2001 did not achieve substantial results. However, the commission hoped that a positive reinforcement of the European prospective would push the reforms at a higher speed making Albania gain the lost terrain to other Western Balkan countries. For this purpose an EU – Albania Consultative Task Force was created with the aim of monitoring the implementation of reforms and providing possible recommendations. This task force held four different meeting in 2002. Each meeting was intended to monitor different aspects of the reforms according to the criteria set by the EU. In October 2002, after receiving the reports by the task force, the Council approved the starting of SAA negotiations with Albania. The Council also reaffirmed the importance of reforms by stating that only the creation of required capacities for the SAA agreement would bring to a successful conclusion of the negotiations.

An important factor in aiding the opening of negotiations is the election in July 2002 of Alfred Moisiu as president of Albania. President Moisiu was in fact the first consensual president

since 1992. Such a smooth election created a temporary feeling of constructive political environment between government and opposition and was highly commended by the EU. (Hoffmann 2005) Under these conditions, on January 31st 2003, the president of the European Commission Romano Prodi officially opened the negotiation for SAA with Albania. (Vurmo 2008)

2003 – 2006 Negotiating and Signing of the SAA

The Consultative Task Force held another three meetings after the start of SAA negotiations to monitor the advancement of reforms. The results were presented in the “Albania Stabilisation and Association Report 2003”. Being faced with still a slow pace of reforms, the European Commission took a strict stand on Albania’s efforts toward SAA by stating:

“At the current pace of reform implementation, negotiations risk being long and drawn out. Before negotiations can be concluded, Albania will need to demonstrate its ability to implement the provisions of the future Agreement, and to address the priority issues identified by the European Union (EU) through its various reports and monitoring instruments.” (European Commission 2003)

The European Commission also points out that the presence of organized crime, different forms of trafficking, and corruption of state authorities especially in the justice, customs, and police departments have impaired the reforms and might endanger the negotiations themselves. (European Commission 2003) Stronger commitment was requested from the Albanian government, not only to formally accept the reforms but also implement them. Thus, the over mentioned problems strained the negotiations up to three years (much more than Croatia or FYROM). The Thessaloniki Summit held in June 2003 reaffirmed the European Agenda for the Western Balkans. In this summit Albania’s advancement in reforms was acknowledged but compared to other countries it was not enough. In this summit’s declaration the principles of

“own merit” and “catch up” were to be coordinated with EU’s regional approach to the Western Balkans. Therefore, EU’s commitment to the region would not mean assured integration. Movement toward the EU would remain in single countries’ own hands in terms of implementing reforms and respecting Copenhagen criteria. (European Commission 2003)

Moreover, a product of the summit was the creation of European Partnership. These instruments would identify priorities sectors where reforms were needed so that each country would be able to get closer to the EU. These lists of recommendations would be tailored to the specific stage of development of domestic countries in terms of EU accession process and respect of the Copenhagen criteria. (European Commission 2003) Albania received its first European Partnership in 2004. This document contained short term and medium term priorities to be followed by national structures for EU integration. The list of priorities was compiled from the conclusions of the Annual Report on Albania 2004. In response to the European Partnership, the Government of Albania prepared an action plan for the implementation of reforms in the suggested fields. The priorities and the action plan were also discussed in five Consultative Task Force meetings in 2004 – 2005. The Albanian Parliament was also proactive by ensuring European Parliament – Albania Inter-parliamentary meetings and also pushing forward the 2004 National Plan for the Approximation of Legislation. However, what showed clear commitment in respecting European partnership priorities and Copenhagen criteria was the improvement in electoral reforms and implementation in the parliamentary elections of 2005. The ODHIR mission of OSCE was invited to monitor these elections. Their final conclusion, although taking into account different problems, remained positive:

“The 3 July 2005 parliamentary election complied, only in part, with OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections, and marked some progress in the conduct of elections in Albania. It was a competitive contest and voters were offered a wide electoral choice from a range of political parties.” (OSCE 2005)

The improvement of the electoral process in 2005 that led to a smooth change in government coalition was commended also in the European Commission’s annual progress report on Albania. The Commission recognized that most of the OSCE/ODHIR recommendations on previous elections were taken into account and measures were taken to improve the entire process. Moreover, they noticed the commitment of the Albanian governmental structures to fulfill the European Partnership priorities, although implementation still remained to be seen. The final conclusion of the report says that:

“Albania has made some progress in implementing the European Partnership’s short term priorities, but has not yet begun to address concertedly those set out for the medium term. Notable progress has been made in the adoption of new legislation and in the formulation of action plans. In some cases implementation has followed, but in many cases proper implementation has been hampered by a difficulty in making available resources combined in some cases with a lack of political will.” (European Commission 2005)

There was clearly still much work ahead but also the commitment to fulfill the requirements for SAA had been evident in the past year. Hence, the European Commission made a political decision to reward Albania’s commitment toward the reforms by allowing the conclusion of negotiations for the SAA. Finally, on June 12th 2006 at the General Affairs and External Relations Council in Luxembourg, the SAA was signed. (Council of the European Union 2006) The news had a positive impact in Albania for it restored to some degree the confidence in the EU integration process. However, the SAA should be mainly understood in the

conditionality it infuses in domestic political and economic structures. This is key phase in the road towards EU accession. A phase in which the obligation and timelines are clearly stated and the democratization process is highly important. This is a phase that focuses on conditionality and thus the Europeanization process through its mechanism should have its highest impact. In the next sections we will explain in details SAA's conditionality towards democratization together with the application of Europeanization mechanisms at their full potential.

Europeanization at its Full Potential

The signing of the SAA brings us to a new phase of contractual relationship between EU and Albania. This document defines in clear terms the requirements that Albania as a potential candidate country has to fulfill in order to become a full member of the EU. Past experience in the regional approach towards Western Balkans and the singular approach towards Albania taught the EU important lessons. The previous vagueness in both membership opportunities and specific requirements brought nothing but a weak influence in the democratization process and a lack of dedication by Western Balkan countries in administrative reforms. SAA with Albania tries to change all this by giving clear outlines on obligations of the domestic institutions and assistance by the EU with respective timelines to be followed. The SAA is the most detailed formal document that tries to infuse in Albania's domestic system the catalysts for the democratization process. Thus, conditionality was clearly prescribed by the EU and formally accepted by Albania. There is an asymmetric relationship in a doctor-patient style. Accordingly, the EU prescribes a type of medicament through its Europeanization mechanisms. This medicament in theory should push Albania's democratization process forward. In the next sections we will present the application of SAA through the Europeanization mechanisms. The reaction of Albania's governmental and political structures will serve as the indicator of the effectiveness of such mechanisms.

The application of Europeanization Mechanisms

The EU has a series of tools in its power to ensure that potential candidate countries absorb the structures, policies, and norms best-fitted to the European standards. Grabbe's list of these tools include templates for both institutions and legislations, financial aid, benchmarking with other countries and also own objectives, advice from EU experts, and gate

keeping to more advanced accession stages. (Grabbe 2006) However, we have to bear in mind that the transfer of structures, policies, and norms is a two – level game. We do not have only the EU with its incentive and coercive power in transmitting new rules of the game, but also domestic political elites. These domestic actors are constrained by structural legacies and behavioral patterns. (Elbasani 2009) It is in fact the combination of these two levels that will shape up the transfer from the EU to the domestic level. We will now continue by explaining how the EU applied pressure through its Europeanization mechanisms within the context of SAA in Albania. The focus will be given to those transfers that relate to the political criteria of SAA and the democratization process in Albania. We will then analyze the reaction of domestic actors mainly government and political parties with the aim of finding the factors that affect the latitude of Europeanization's impact on democratization.

The European Model

The Mechanism of Model entails the adoption into domestic legislation of the *acquis communautaire*. The official number of pages of all the EU legislation related to the *acquis* amounts to 80,000. However, an interesting research done by the EU – Critical organization Open Europe shows that by 2005 the number of pages of all currently functioning *acquis* legislations amounts to almost 170,000. (Open Europe 2005) If we try to conceptualize such a series of documents with pages laid out one after the other we would get a line with the length of more than 190 kilometers. Candidate and potential candidate countries have to approximate their domestic legislation with the EU legislation presented in the *acquis*. This does not entail the copying and pasting of laws from the EU legislation. In fact, the entire process of approximation is understood in terms of legal norms. Domestic laws that follow the same legal norms as the EU will remain untouched whereas in other cases there can be partial or complete approximation. In

fact “the process of approximation might be understood also as the process of the Europeanization of the domestic law and institutions because of its strong impact on their future configuration and responsibilities.” (Daci 2008)

The Albanian Government has been receptive of the EU requirement in terms of the adoption of EU legislation. For this purpose, the Albanian Government created the “National Plan for the Implementation of the SAA 2007 – 2012”. In this plan, the adoption of the *acquis* takes an important part with the creation of legal initiatives and implementing activities in fields where legal reform is required. (Government of Albania 2007)

An imperative aspect to be considered is that the reforms in legislation cannot be considered separately from the reforms in the structures that implement the legislation. Therefore, the condition and reform of the judiciary system is of great importance to the success of the legislative reform inspired by legal approximation with EU legislation. In Albania’s case, unfortunately we have to notice that the human resources working in the judiciary are rather conservative and unable to easily adapt to European standards. It is quite comprehensible that judiciary has difficulties in the application of EU legislation and especially international law. First of all, the quality of the judges is left wanted. Surveys have shown that the judicial system has repeatedly turned out to be the most mistrusted system by the general public. (USAID 2010) It would seem that the judicial system suffers chronically from accountability, transparency, and independence from the political sphere. The main literature on international law is in English and so is the entire *acquis*. For an old guard of judicial officers adaptation with the new language is difficult to achieve. For this purpose, the Ministry of Integration of Albania has created the Directorate for Translation of Acquis Communautaire using both internal and freelance

translators. However, the amount of documentation and the always changing priority sectors make this process advance rather slowly.

The SAA progress reports present a somewhat confusing picture of the judicial system in Albania. Since the signing of the SAA in 2006, yearly monitoring of the judicial system operations has been one of the main tasks of the EU delegation in Albania. What is surprising is the fact that every progress report presents the situation of the judiciary as improving but still with many problems. (European Commission 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009) Bearing in mind the importance of the judiciary as the implementing actor of the reforms, more attention should have been given by both the Government and the EU delegation. The maintenance of stable but very slow pace of improvements in the judiciary practically dissolves the impact of the Mechanism of Model in Albania.

Another difficulty that has been evident in the process of legislative reforms is the extreme polarization of the Albanian political system. Major legislative reforms in Albania require a qualitative majority of the votes in the parliament which in numerical terms means more than 3/5 of the members of the parliament. The Democratic Party which has been in power since the signing of the SAA has never been able to achieve such a majority within its own coalition camp. Therefore, major reforms have been subject to temporary co-operation between the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party. Hence, the reforms in the context of SAA have the trait of a stop and go process, where period of political deadlock are separated by brief moments of co-operation.

The progress reports of the EU show a similar outlook. In the 2006 progress report, the EU notices that the political deadlock during the spring and summer months of the same year blocked important SAA reforms (especially the electoral reform). (European Commission 2006) In

fact, only an intervention by international actors operating in the country made the resolution of the disagreements between the parties possible. This led the EU to assert that is not yet ready to show domestically generated political co-operation. (European Commission 2006) The reforms situation remained gloomy in 2007, where yet another set of election (this time local) where progressive compared to the previous ones but did not meet the required standards. (OSCE 2007) The results of these elections were contested by both camps and the will to co-operate on reforms was in fact nonexistent. The situation changed in 2008 when the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party agreed on a new electoral code. The EU commended such consensus between the main parties and quickly turned to a positive progress report for 2008. (European Commission 2008) However, what the EU failed to recognize was the outrage of the smaller parties to this new reform that fictively raised the threshold of entering the parliament. The protest of smaller parties was not enough to persuade the EU delegation away from the support of this electoral reform. However, the smaller parties until that time had served as a buffer between the main forces. With their decreasing number of members of parliament a new balance of power in the political arena was expected. The parliamentary elections of 2009 were a confirmation of this new balance of power. The Democratic Party was able to maintain power only through a stunning move creating a coalition with the leftist Socialist Movement for Integration. (OSCE 2009) However, the election's results were too close and the accusation for rigged election brought to the oppositions boycott of the parliament that lasted until the beginning of 2012. During this time Albania applied for candidate status in the EU. However, the lack of reforms especially in fields related to the political criteria and democratization brought to two consequent rejections. Reforms in legislation remained hostage of political consensus.

This section presented the Mechanism of Models and its conceptions as the absorption of legislative norms from the EU through the *acquis communautaire* to Albania domestic legislative system. Moreover, we showed that the Government's commitment to the transposition of laws is not enough. The technical issues related to the size of the *acquis*, the state of the judiciary as the implementing actor of this legislation, and the extreme polarization of the Albanian political system present important factors in the dissipation of Mechanism of Models' impact.

Financial Aid

The EU has been the largest provider of financial aid in Albania since the fall of the communist regime. The three main EU financial aid programs that enlisted Albania as a beneficiary are: PHARE, CARDS, and IPA. EU's intervention through these financial programs has changed priorities in accordance with the most problematic areas detected during Albania's transition process.

The PHARE financial assistance program in Albania was focused mainly on humanitarian aid and the creation of proper conditions for the developing of a market economy. This aid was highly effective especially during the Albanian food crises in the years 1991 – 1993 and the financial crises of 1997. Moreover, the EU included special aid packages within the PHARE program to help nearly 800,000 refugees from Kosovo during the conflict in 1999. In the period 1991 – 1999, the financial aid allocated to Albania within the PHARE program amounted to 620 million Euros. (European Commission 1999) Although highly important, the PHARE financial aid was directed to infrastructure building and not directly related with the democratization process of the country. Therefore, the impact of this Europeanization mechanism until 1999 can be considered null.

The second financial aid program CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Democratization and Stabilisation) was presented in the Zagreb Summit in June 2000. Presenting a clear offer for EU membership to Western Balkans countries, the EU changed the scope of financial aid to fit the context of conditionality. Therefore, the main focus of this program was the support of the democratic, economic, and institutional reforms. (European Commission 2000)

Between the years 2001 – 2006 the CARDS assistance to Albania amounted to 330 million Euros and the four prioritized sectors were: justice and home affairs – receiving 40% of the funds, economic and social development – receiving 35% of the funds, administrative capacity building – receiving 20% of the funds, and democratic Stabilisation – receiving 5% of the funds. (European Commission 2009)

We can say that some of the CARDS programs were highly effective especially in improving the state of the police administration through new infrastructure and equipment (program PAMECA I and II), customs administration through the computerization of the customs system (program CAM – A), and penitentiary administration through the improvement of prison infrastructure. However, financial aid through CARDS did not manage to achieve great results in the areas of improvement of the judicial administration and fight against corruption. (European Commission 2006)

Moreover, 5% of CARDS fund dedicated to democratic Stabilisation were used in projects aimed at revitalizing the civil society. However, throughout the entire period in which CARDS was enforced, the Albanian civil society was reported to lack in organization capacities, advocacy skills, and involvement in governmental policy making. (European Commission 2006)

Thus, the impact of Europeanization in fields related to the democratization process in Albania was weakened by a judicial system non responsive to economic incentives and an indifferent civil society.

The Instrument for Pre – Accession Aid program (IPA) is the new financial aid program of the EU dedicated to countries undergoing the pre-accession negotiations for full EU membership. The period for this program is 2007 – 2013. The beneficiaries are countries that already have EU-candidate status but also countries that have potential-candidate status. (European Council 2006) In the first group we have FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), Croatia (who was recently accepted as a full member but benefitted from IPA since 2007), and Turkey. Potential candidates are Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo.

The main aim of this program is of course to help the above mentioned countries advance their EU integration progress; therefore this program provides only guidelines and the actual strategic objectives vary in terms of the countries' position in the EU conditionality scheme.

IPA has five components:

- Component I - “Support for transition and institution-building” financing capacity-building and institution-building
- Component II - “Cross-border cooperation” supporting the beneficiary countries in the area of cross-border cooperation between themselves, with the EU Member States or within the framework of cross-border or inter-regional actions.
- Component III – “Regional development” aimed at supporting the countries' preparations for the implementation of the Community's cohesion policy, and in particular for the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund;
- Component IV – “Human resources development” concerns preparation for participation in cohesion policy and the European Social Fund;

- Component V – “Rural development” concerns preparation for the common agricultural policy and related policies and for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). (European Council 2006)

Countries that have “potential candidate” status are allowed to receive funds only from Components I and II. Therefore, the aid given to Albania is within the fields of institutional building and common projects with Montenegro, Kosovo, FYROM, and Greece. The following table describes the amount of funds given within the IPA program to Albania from 2007 till today:

Component	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
I - Transition assistance and Institutional Building	54.3	62,1	70,9	82,7	84,3	85,9
II - Cross Border Co-operation	6.6	8,5	10,2	10,4	10,6	10,9
Total	61	70,7	81,2	93,2	95,0	96,9

*All values are in millions of Euros (European Commission 2012)

IPA funds are allocated in terms of three priorities that follow the logic of SAA and Copenhagen criteria: Priority Axis 1 – Political Criteria, Priority Axis 2 – Socio Economic Criteria, Priority Axis 3 – Ability to assume obligation of membership. The logic of funds allocation remains similar to the CARDS program. Accordingly, the programs under the political criteria focus on providing equipment and improving the infrastructure of judiciary, penitentiary, police, and customs administration. This priority axis continuously received about 30% of the total funds allocated. Again, technical advancements in police and customs operations have been considered successful in advancing their capabilities. On the other hand, the judiciary is lagging

behind. Funds allocated to infrastructure development of the judiciary are not accompanied by training programs for the human capital resources. The EU delegation in Albania that oversees the implementation of IPA lacks in terms of managing personnel. Most of the times, the EU delegation employs international experts that stay in Albania only for a short period of time and have no prior experience in the domestic socio-political environment. What is also interesting is that programs dedicated to the encouragement and organization of civil society are not included as in previous financial aid mechanisms. This fact is quite interesting considering that EU's own progress reports for Albania continue to deem civil society as being in a state of apathy excluded from the policy-making process. (European Commission 2011)

Moreover, the lack of co-operation between the political forces has affected IPA's effectiveness too. We have to mention that successful IPA project have to consider the coordination of IPA objectives, national objectives, and regional objectives. In the last regional elections of 2011, 35 out of 70 municipalities were won by the Socialist Party. Therefore, the political conflict, resulting from the Democratic Party controlling the central government and the Socialist Party controlling the majority of municipalities, is translated into different objectives at the national and regional level. Hence, the implementation of IPA programs especially in these regions is rather difficult. (European Movement Albania 2010)

In terms of democratization, the financial aid through IPA is concentrated in improving the infrastructure of the institutions that preserve the rule of law in the country. Police administration has benefited a lot from EU funded programs especially in the sector of border security. Operations in the customs administration have greatly improved in terms of transparency through the introduction of the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) software in every customs office in the country. On the other hand, projects related to the

judiciary have not been able to improve the overall performance of this sector in terms of transparency and independence from the political sphere. Corruption has been fought through the introduction of new EU accepted practices in the operations of the Public Procurement Agency. However, the number of allegations for corruption and mistrust in the tendering process still remain high. There has also been lack of funding for other dimensions of democratization. The rule of law by itself is unable to ensure improvements in the quality of democracy in the country. With the decrease of funding dedicated to civil society the participation dimension of democracy is weakened. Therefore, Europeanization through financial aid in the sphere of democratization and the improvement in the political criteria for EU membership remains a half – done job.

Twinning and Technical Assistance

The Mechanism of Twinning and Technical Assistance is concerned with the EU's expert advice to Albanian structures for the improvement of domestic capacities. By using this mechanism the EU tries to facilitate the absorption by domestic countries of European policies, rules, and norms. Twinning programs are created to develop democratic institutions that would have the necessary capacities to implement the requirements of the *acquis*. The European Commission serves as an intermediary between countries that are undergoing though the accession process and member states. Candidate and potential candidate countries are required to put forward requests for twinning projects in the areas where they think expert advice is needed. Member states, on the other hand, are required to provide experts to the EU on the fields of democratization and institutional capacity building. The European Commission then allocates the experts to the candidate and potential candidate countries. The duration of each twinning program varies on the topic and rate of difficulty in transporting the knowhow. The main program related to twinning efforts is the Technical Assistance Information Exchange Office

(TAIEX). The other supplementing program is the Support for Improvement in Government and Management (SIGMA) created by the OECD that converges with TAIEX in a series of trainings and workshops.

TAIEX started functioning in Albania since 2004. Since then there has been an increasing trend in the number of TAIEX projects hosted in Albania and the number of participants from Albania in domestic or regional projects. The main focus of TAIEX is to provide short term assistance in the form of information exchange. The beneficiaries of this technical assistance are those domestic stakeholders that play a role in EU led reforms. These stakeholders include both the public administration as well as other parts of the civil society such as NGO's or interest groups. The start of TAIEX operations in Albania was quite slow. In the first year of functioning, only 2 event projects were hosted in Albania with a total of 131 participants. (European Commission 2004) This indicator is rather low due to the fact that Albanian institutions were not well aware of the procedures for requesting events. TAIEX in fact is a demand driven program, where beneficiary countries should present their project plans in co-ordination with the priorities set by the SAA. In the next years the application procedure by the Ministry of Integration of Albania was more efficient. In 2005, the number of event hosted in Albania increased to 16 and the number of participant reached 604. (European Commission 2005) With the signing of the SAA in 2006 and the formal achievement of the EU potential candidate status, the number of TAIEX projects held in Albania increased as well. The table below shows the TAIEX events held yearly in Albania with the respective number of participants:

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Nr. of Events	8	20	51	64	55
Nr. of	371	614	1413	1909	1302

Participants					
---------------------	--	--	--	--	--

(European Commission 2010)

The TAIEX projects hosted in Albania in the context of SAA include a wide range of topics from political to economic and structural aspects of the accession process. The experts that present the knowhow in pushing the accession process forward are selected from by the TAIEX administration. This experts register on a voluntary basis and mainly include public sector officials from EU member states but also officials working at the EU level. Their expertise is checked during the application process and then classified in terms of the chapters of the *acquis*. Thus, when a country makes a request for a technical assistance event TAIEX administration has an already made list of experts in that particular field. The instruments TAIEX uses in Albania are three: Workshops, Expert Missions, and Study Visits. The choice of the instrument depends on the goals previously set. Workshops last up to two days and are addressed to topics with where a large number of stakeholders is involved. Expert Missions last a bit longer (up to five days) and are requested for topic where there is a need of in depth examination of an issue. Study Visits are used for a smaller number of participants (three at most). These visits are dedicated to technical explanations that can be done only in the working environment for example the training of a few officials in new software. We have to mention that in Albania, in topics regarding the different dimensions of democratization, the instrument of choice has been Workshops. Expert Missions have been used especially in discussions and transposition of legislative texts and Study Visits have been dedicated to more technical issues.

There has been a series of difficulties in the application of the over mentioned TAIEX projects. First of all, the experts selected to present in workshops, missions, and study visits come from different backgrounds. Since most of them come from member states' structures, they bring the conceptions of EU accepted policies, regulations, and norms. We have to bear in mind

that policies on a specific field, let's say financial stability, are considered differently in the United Kingdom and in Greece. When two experts from different countries are called to present on similar topics, confusion in the audience can be easily created. Moreover, presentations are often performed using a highly technical language which imparts the understanding of the participant. (European Movement Albania 2010) In general, these projects are too short. A two to five days workshop or training program does little to change patterns of operations or behavior, especially when feedbacks are not drawn from participants after projects are finished. (European Movement Albania 2010) Thus one of the only ways to maintain a high level of enthusiasm for participating in such twinning and technical assistance programs is holding the event in luxury resorts.

Benchmarking and Monitoring

Albania is not the only country currently undergoing through the accession process. The mechanism of Benchmarking takes meaning in the regional context. Thus countries that are undergoing SAA reforms are ranked in terms of yearly advancement. This would promote competition between countries in terms of reaching accession goals earlier. Benchmarking is closely connected with other Europeanization mechanisms especially Gate – Keeping and Financial Aid. A country that adopts reforms better than another is allowed to cross to the forward stages of accession thus gaining the ability to apply for more financial aid. For example, Macedonia having already passed through the potential candidate phase and achieved candidate status can apply for all the components of IPA. On the other hand, Albania having only the potential candidate status can apply only for two out of five. This will in turn present a competitive advantage for Macedonia in strategic sectors. Ranking countries on specific policy

fields brings also a redirection of reform efforts to the fields where EU is of the opinion that development is needed.

The second part of this mechanism is Monitoring and the tool that EU has devised for this purpose is the publication of yearly progress reports. Progress reports do not only present the success or failure of reforms in the country level. By going to a deeper level like specific ministries or policy areas the EU is able to provide indicators of performance in the lower levels of government and public administration. Moreover, the publication of progress reports open the door to more debate at the domestic level by allowing a large number of stakeholders to control the performance of specific public actors. This creates a larger spectrum of criticism for lack of commitment and implementation of reforms and possibly brings about opportunities for domestic political and structural change. NGO's cite progress reports in their publications; the media uses the progress reports to open political debate; interest groups use criticism and recommendations of the progress reports in their lobbying efforts; the opposition uses progress reports to point out problems and gain political leverage; the government uses progress reports as an indication of future priority sectors. Moreover, progress reports are used in close connection with the other Europeanization mechanism: Gate – Keeping. It is actually through the progress reports that the EU makes a final decision on whether a country is in fact ready to enter next stages in the accession process. Accordingly, Monitoring has an impact on both the internal arena of domestic politics as well as European level decisions.

However, the impact of the Albania progress reports in domestic politics and especially the democratization process are hindered by a series of factors. First of all, we have a rather vague language trying to express problems in general terms. Commonly used terms are “more effort is needed”, “greater attention should be devoted to”, “further strengthening of capacity is

necessary”, “sound co-operation is needed”. It is difficult in the progress reports to find clear recommendations on actions to be taken when problems are pointed out. For example, when talking about the situation of the judiciary, the Albania progress report of 2006 notes that “judicial proceedings remain lengthy, poorly organised and lack transparency” and after lining up a series of other problems in this field concludes the section by stating “Legal certainty is fundamental to Albania's reform progress and is an important precondition for a number of obligations under the SAA”. (European Commission 2006) There is no mentioning how the problems are to be solved or which policies should the government take. Examples like this are innumerable in the progress reports. The effectiveness of the Albania progress reports was hindered by the lack of a clear direction on where the “push for action” of the progress reports should be channeled.

Moreover, as the transition period towards EU accession stretches, the impact it has on the media and civil society loses its power. Therefore, as time passes after their release, progress reports become old news. However, another set of documents that can be included in the Monitoring mechanism are Opinions of the European Commission on the developments of a country. Albania submitted its application for EU membership in April 2009. The European Commission responded with an opinion on November 2010 that rejected Albania’s application and provided a list of 12 concrete recommendations on the areas where development was needed to achieve candidate status (all of them related to the political criteria and the process of democratization). (European Commission 2010) In this sense the opinion mitigated the issues related to the progress reports by providing courses of action to be followed by Albanian political actors. The same response with the exact same list of recommendation was given the next year showing clearly that Albanian political actors were not able to address the integration issues.

Thus, in the first year even the opinion was not effective in creating the desired actions. In fact, the extremely conflicting political situation managed to dismantle the power of this mechanism too. The Albanian Government accused the opposition for not aiding in the reforms that need a qualitative majority in the parliament. On the other hand, the Socialist Party accused the government for being ineffective in fulfilling EU requirements. After a few weeks of public debate in the civil society and media, accountability remained nameless.

The Europeanization mechanisms of Benchmarking and Monitoring have the potential to greatly affect the domestic policies and push the democratization process forward. However, the practical application leaves a lot of space for criticism in terms of the vague signal used in terms of recommendation and accountability.

Gate - Keeping

Probably the most important Europeanization mechanism is Gate Keeping. By using this mechanism the EU has the power to control admission in the different stages of the accession process. This mechanism ensures that candidate countries and potential candidate countries push forward the reforms based on the Copenhagen criteria and SAA. Its simplicity makes it more reliable than the other mechanism. Financial aid and technical advice can be used as indirect incentives for implementing reforms. However, Gate – Keeping can rely on the coercive power of direct consequences on the accession process: if you don't fulfill the reforms you do not become an EU member. With the experience of previous waves on enlargement the importance of this mechanism has been noticed too. Therefore, today's accession process is divided into different stages and the EU can use Gate – Keeping at each stage.

Since EU's commitment to offer membership opportunities to Western Balkan countries Albania had to pass through different stages to achieve potential candidate status. The first stage

to pass was the feasibility study for Albania's ability to withstand the requirements of the SAA in 1999. This feasibility study presented a negative result. Thus, Albania was forced to push for reforms and it was in the beginning of 2003 that this country was able to receive the green light for the start of SAA negotiations. Even before the negotiation had started Gate – Keeping was used twice. The next stage was the conclusion of the SAA negotiations. This process also took a longer than expected. It lasted three straining years of reforms being undertaken and other reforms being requested. In June 2006 Albania signed the SAA. The next stage will be the acceptance of the Application for Membership. Albania presented such an application in 2009 and waited for almost a year for the first response. The EU applied Gate – Keeping again and did not let Albania pass on the stage of candidate status. However, what is still surprising is the Albania's political actors' defiance of the recommendations which brought to another negative response in October 2011. (European Commission 2011)

Gate – Keeping and its blunt conditionality have lost some of its power in Albania. In the previous chapter, when we explained the difficult road that Albania took towards the SAA, we explained that in both stages of opening the negotiations and closing the negotiations of the SAA Albania passed through by a political decision. The required level of reforms was not there, however the EU decided to reward the Albania's commitment by allowing the country to gain potential candidate status. Albania's last efforts show that EU's reward in terms of allowing the country to pass through the SAA negotiations was perceived as a weakness of EU's conditionality. If the same logic is applied for the Application for membership, it is enough that Albania shows merely a commitment (not implementation) towards reforms in order to get candidate status. We can couple this logic with Schimmelfennig's idea that "a failure to internalize the community rules is not punished beyond withholding the reward".

(Schimmelfennig 2001) The result show that Gate – Keeping is used in order to humiliate to some extent countries in the accession process but it cannot go as far as excluding them for it would question the acceptance of countries in previous stages. Thus, realistically speaking Albania's lack of commitment in implementing reforms can only be punished by an extension of the accession process and not by a threat of being kicked out of it. Previous political decisions to use Gate – Keeping in Albania also as a reward instead of a form of conditionality bring to question its effectiveness as an Europeanization mechanism.

This chapter focused on the application of Europeanization mechanism in Albania within the context of SAA. The case was made that even if in this stage of the accession process conditionality achieves its highest impact, there is a multitude of factors that do not allow Europeanization in Albania to show its full power, the most important of which is the extreme polarization of the political system where conflict rather than co-operation is the norm. In the next chapter we will analyze how the democratization process reacted to influences from the Europeanization mechanism.

Democratization Issues under the SAA

With the signing of the SAA the Europeanization mechanisms that work through the paradigm of conditionality were free to influence the domestic policies in Albania. Since the Copenhagen criteria of 1993, the ability to create a stable and high quality democracy has been seen as one of the main conditions for EU accession. In previous waves of enlargement, the EU has been considered to have been one of the greatest promoters of democracy in CEE countries. (Pridham 2001, Vachudova 2006) In terms of democratization, the EU plays the role of a gravitational force that attracts candidate countries through the prospect of integration and changes their structures, policies, and norms into liberal democratic ones. Once there is a commitment towards the integration process, Europeanization is considered to catalyze the process of improving the quality of democracy.

Albania's democratization process immediately after the fall of the communist regime was slow and at times confused. The reasons can be found in the specific typology of Albania's communist heritage. The extreme isolation and the physical elimination of all liberal figures, resulted in the 90s in a political elite that was not experienced enough to direct the country towards a sane democratic development. The EU at the time did not offer any membership prospects limiting its intervention to humanitarian and infrastructural aid. The progress in democratization was left to the domestic political class which in turn was not able to overcome the difficulties created by such a strong political and economic shift. The criticized elections, financial and social crises of the 1990s showed that without a gravitational force such as the EU, Albania couldn't deliver on its democratization objectives.

When the EU offered a clear membership prospective to the Western Balkans things changed. Albania government showed willingness to undertake the necessary democratic

reforms. However, willingness was not enough and the extreme polarization trait of Albania's political culture impaired the implementation of democratic reforms. Nevertheless, stages were passed and in 2006 Albania became a potential candidate country for EU membership. In this chapter we will present the major issues in the democratization process of Albania under the SAA focusing on holding of free and fair elections and corruption related events. We will also point out how this process was affected by the application of Europeanization conditionality. We will introduce international indicators of democratic quality such as the Freedom House Nation in Transit Rating, The Economist Democracy Index, and Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. This chapter will continue with a series of events that marked the democratization process in Albania.

Local Elections of 2007

After the SAA was signed in 2006 there was a general optimism about the political relations within the country and a speedy advancement in the required reforms. Such a feeling quickly dissipated with the arrival of the local elections of 2007. Disagreements between the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party on the amendments to the electoral code made the organizing of the elections on the previously announced date 20th of January impossible. (OSCE 2007) President Moisiu was forced to intervene and organize round tables with representatives from all parties in the period 9 – 12th January 2007. After the parties debated over sensitive issues such the usage of birth certificates with photos as identification documents the parties finally came to a political agreement on Constitutional and Electoral Code amendments that would make the elections possible. The elections were held on the 18th February 2007. As usual, an OSCE/ODHIR mission monitored the entire process. In its conclusion this monitoring mission states:

“The 2007 local elections only partly met OSCE Commitments and other international standards for democratic elections. While these elections provided for a competitive contest, it is of concern that the main political parties of Albania have, once again, placed narrow and short-term party interests over the stability and trustworthiness of the election process. The main political parties of Albania have largely failed to fulfill the considerable responsibilities and duties vested with them in the preparation and conduct of the elections. The electoral process was therefore frequently stalled and seemed to be close to the point of collapse on repeated occasions. As a result, local elections had to be postponed by nearly a month from the original date of 20 January 2007.” (OSCE 2007)

Moreover, the Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC) organized a more practical monitoring mission on the voting and counting procedures on the day of the elections. AHC noticed that the delays in the reforms in the Electoral Code and the postponement of the election data brought a series of logistic difficulties for the organization of the elections. Electoral commissioners in voting centers were not properly trained in respect to the new procedures agreed only one month earlier. Thus, the entire process suffered from delays, mismanagement and technical difficulties such as delays in opening of voting centers, family voting, problems with the identification documents, errors in the voters’ lists, and emigrants’ and disabled people inability to vote. (Albanian Helsinki Committee 2007)

The observations of the local elections of 2007 served as a cold shower for the Albanian political sphere. It was another example where the short term gains in the domestic sphere were realized at the expense of fulfilling the European standards of free and fair elections. As a major factor in the democratization process brought once again at the attention of the EU delegation in Albania the inability of Albanian political forces to co-operate without external pressures.

The Reforms of 2008

The local elections of 2007 brought to light the difficulties of co-operation among Albanian political parties. Moreover, they showed clearly that for further advancement in

democratic quality in terms of political representation a new and improved Electoral Code was required. Hence the two main political parties, Democratic Party and Socialist Party, took upon themselves to reach to an agreement on a new Electoral Code that would include the recommendations of OSCE/ODHIR so clearly emphasized in the SAA progress reports. These meetings were organized at the beginning of 2008 and the two main parties presented their drafts and recommendations for a new Electoral Code. The results were more radical than anticipated.

The previous Electoral Code envisaged Albanian Elections with a mixture of majoritarian and proportional systems. Albania was divided into 100 single member constituencies with relatively equal population. Another 40 members of parliament were allocated by political parties according to the portion of votes. (Parliament of Albania 2003) The new Electoral Code of 2008 restructured the distribution of votes entirely into a newly created Regional – Proportional System. The 12 administrative regions of Albania were now turned into multi – member constituencies. Parties would present their own lists of candidates for each region and members of parliament would be allocated by proportional results. The new code also included an increase in the threshold political parties had to pass in order to be represented in the parliament. For single political parties the threshold was increased from 2,5 to 3% and for party coalitions from 4,5 to 5%. (Parliament of Albania 2008) This transformation of the electoral system inevitably favored the two main political parties at the expense of the small parties. Small parties, that relied on a cumulative number of votes from all the regions of Albania, would find it difficult, if not impossible, to enter the parliament without engaging in a coalition with one of the main parties. When commenting the impact of these electoral reforms in the democratization process of Albania, Claude Moniquet president of the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center stated that:

“While Albania, which became a democracy in 1991 after the fall of Communism, has behind it a long history of electoral violence and irregularities, one may wonder whether this new reform is not just a way for the two major parties to lock up the national political system and, by extension, Albanian democracy, by marginalizing, even purely and simply eliminating, the ‘small’ parties.” (Moniquet 2008)

However, the general perception in the international sphere on the electoral reforms of 2008 was positive. Bringing the Democratic Party and Socialist Party together at the same table of negotiations with a resulting agreement was considered a victory in itself. On the other hand, the reaction of the small parties was quick and forceful. The first step was informing European authorities on the development and risks of the new Electoral Code. In a letter directed to the European Commission, six leaders of small parties in Albania led by the deputy speaker of the Parliament called on the EU to intervene”

“We call on you to intervene and to prevent SP and DP from monopolizing and thus compromising the elections in Albania. It is already obvious that these two parties want to reduce the democratic space of the other parties and artificially inflate the electoral result of their own, which is most likely to go down due to their unpopular policies and involvement into corruption affairs.” (Ceka, et al. 2009)

After a series of protest in the parliament, on November 11th deputies from two of the Socialist Movement for Integration and Demo-Christian Party closed themselves in a hunger strike in the parliament building. In the declaration released for the media they were “highly concerned with the antidemocratic and antinational endeavors of the Democratic Party and Socialist Party leadership to ratify an Electoral Code that is against the basic principles of a democratic society: free and fair elections”. (Koha Jone 2008) The hunger strike continued until November 19th when the Parliament of Albania voted and ratified the Electoral Code reforms.

The electoral system was not the only product of the political cooperation of 2008. In fact the two main parties used this political momentum to draft some amendments to the constitution in relation to the President and Prosecutor General status. The result of these amendments was in

fact the empowerment of the executive and especially the figure of the Prime Minister. The President's election needed a qualitative majority of 3/5 of the votes in the parliament. The new amendments made its election possible only with a simple majority of 50% plus one vote. The figure of the President as a representation of national unity and as a essential part of the balance of powers could now be appointed by whomever won the next elections. Bearing in mind the cleavages in Albanian politics, a President elected without a general consensus bears the risk being heavily influenced by the political party in government. The next state institution to be weakened was the Prosecutor General figure whose mandate was reduced to 5 years and could be subject to a no-confidence vote by which a simple majority could request its dismissal. The Venice commission in an opinion on the these constitutional amendments noted that with a reduced mandate the General Prosecutor may be unduly influenced in his or her decisions by the desire to be re-elected. (Venice Commission 2008)

Therefore, the constitutional and electoral reforms that resulted from the political agreement between the two main parties in 2008 weakened the democratization process in Albania. These reforms laid the ground for the removal of small political parties form the parliament and thus political debate. Moreover, they concentrated the power on the hands of the executive at the expense of the President and the Prosecutor General thus posing a threat to the balance of power between the institutions of the country. The EU did not provide an active input on these reforms by simply commending the cooperation of the cooperation between the parties and not foreseeing the impact that such reforms could have in Albania's democratization process. Only a few European Members of Parliament led by Paulo Casaca try to bring to the attention of the European Commission the impacts of the 2008 reforms in Albania. In a written question to the commission he states that:

“I wish to draw the Commission’s attention to the upcoming electoral reform in Albania. The new electoral code might lead to the disappearance of several parliamentary parties which might considerably weaken the political debate and therefore might undermine democracy in Albania.” (Casaca 2008)

In a very politically correct reply to this written question, Commissioner Olli Rehn made it clear that the Commission did not intend to interfere in the political debates within Albania. The commission would monitor closely the parliamentary elections of 2009 which would be considered a test on Albania’s democratic maturity. (Rehn 2008) Therefore, the EU decided not to provide guidance and without guidance Albania’s democratic maturity test was doomed to fail.

Parliamentary Elections and Boycott 2009 - 2010

The parliamentary elections of 2009 were considered by internal and external political actors as the final test on the sustainability of the democratization process in Albania. The two main parties had agreed on the new Electoral Code in 2008 and had coerced most of the small parties to be included in the two coalitions: Alliance for Change (Democratic Party and allies in government – center right) and Unification for Change (Socialist Party and allies in opposition – center left). The few remaining parties gathered around the Socialist Movement for Integration to form the Socialist Alliance for Integration. The elections were held on June 28th 2009 however the results final results were published only on August 1st. (Central Electoral Committee 2009) In these elections, the coalition led by Prime Minister Sali Berisha managed to win a majority of voted and together with its allies received 70 seat out of 140. On the other hand, the opposition led by Edi Rama could only manage to get 66 seats. (Central Electoral Committee 2009) Thus, no coalition by itself was able to create a government. In a stunning move, the leader of the Socialist Movement for Integration decided to join the right center right Alliance for Change

(against whom it had performed an electoral campaign characterized by a violent political discourse) and thus form a new government. The Socialist Party cried for treason of the leftist values and the next days were characterized by an aggressive political discourse both in the media and at the Central Electoral Committee.

These elections marked considerable advancement in the technical aspects of the election process. Mass production of new highly secure ID cards and nationally computerized voter's lists were considered by monitoring staff as significantly more reliable than in previous elections. Monitoring missions also commended the consensus in which electoral reforms were undertaken in preparation for the Election Day. However, even with all these procedural improvements Albania failed to reach the required standards for free and fair elections. The report of the OSCE/ODHIR is clear on this matter:

“These substantial improvements were overshadowed by the politicization of technical aspects of the process, including during the vote count and tabulation, which temporarily blocked the counting process in some areas, as well as by violations observed during the election campaign. These actions of political parties undermined public confidence in the election process. While meeting most OSCE commitments, these elections did not fully realize Albania's potential to adhere to the highest standards for democratic elections. The conduct of democratic elections depends also largely upon the commitment of all Albanian political parties to respect the letter and the purpose of the law and to discharge their electoral duties in a responsible manner in order to preserve the integrity of the process.” (OSCE 2009)

Thus the problem still remained in the extreme politicization of the entire process. The elections of 2009 showed once again that the Albanian political parties are willing and able to create the legal framework for free and fair elections but are not willing and able to implement such a framework when the political gains are at stake. The political conflict that rose from the questionable counting procedures turned into complaints for specific regions and ballots at the

Central Electoral Committee where both parties accused each other for electoral fraud. It was only at the beginning of August that the official results were announced.

If the elections of 2009 were to be the democratic maturity test for Albania we can say that the test was failed. The political conflict showed during and after the Election Day resulted in an opposition parliamentary boycott. Although the EU delegation in Albania advised compromise as a European way of doing things, both political camps remained immovable. The boycott lasted several months. Finally, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Mevlüt Çavusoglu led a delegation to Albania on February 2010. After a series of round tables with President Bamir Topi and the leader of both party coalitions, Mr. Çavusoglu announced that a compromise with the help of the EU was achieved and political dialogue would be restored shortly. (Council of Europe 2010) In fact, after the PACE delegation left the Socialists Party and its allies entered the parliament and started discussing on future reforms. However, the resolution of the boycott cannot be fully understood as a result of EU intervention. The Socialist members of parliament took the oath on February 25th 2010 which coincides with the constitutional limit of absence from parliamentary proceedings. Therefore, if Socialists would extend the boycott even for a matter of days, they would be removed from the parliament lists.

The behavior of both parties in the months that followed showed the true nature of their cooperation. In a matter of months the Socialist Party re-exited the parliament after being neglected the chairmanship of an Investigative Committee on the 2009 elections. They brought the protests on the street and even organized a 21 day long hunger strike of more than 200 people including members of parliament, eminent figures of civil society, and common supporters. (BBC 2010) The only way to organize a meeting between Prime Minister Sali Berisha and Edi

Rama was by the intervention of the EU. In a quasi anecdotal event, on May 19th both party leaders were invited by the Commissioner for Enlargement Štefan Füle and the heads of the two main blocks in the European Parliament at the restaurant Au Crocodile in Brussels. (The Economist 2010) The representatives of the EU threatened with the suspension of Albania's application for EU membership if political dialogue was not restored. The political situation in Albania did not change after the meeting. Once again, Albanian leaders proved that they can easily adhere to European norms in the presence of EU officials and as easily turn to a violent political discourse at home. On the other hand, the reaction of the EU was mixed in nature. On November 8th 2010, Albania was given the green light on the visa liberalization regime with countries in the Schengen zone. (Council of the European Union 2010) The Democratic Party in government quickly used the opportunity to take all the merit for the process. One month later the European Commission published the opinion on Albania's application for EU membership rejecting the candidate status for lack of reforms in the political criteria. (European Commission 2010) This time was the Socialist Party that didn't lose time in criticizing the government for the lack of progress in both European Integration and democratization. Albania's political deadlock combined with mix signals sent by the EU brought to a halt in democratization progress during after the elections of 2009. During this period the domestic focus on short term political gains and the neglecting of co-operative norms made the impact of Europeanization in the democratization process quasi null.

Deaths at the Boulevard 2011

The tense situation origination from the June 2009 elections and the political deadlock of 2010 culminated in a violent protest on January 21st 2010 that signed one of the most tragic days in Albania's democratic history. The spark for this protest was the leaking of a video that showed

the Chairman of the Socialist Movement for Integration who also held the positions of Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Ilir Meta offering a bribe to the Minister of Economy, Trade, and Energy Dritan Prifti. In this video, Meta advises Prifti to give the building permit for a hydro power plant to a certain middleman in exchange for 700,000 Euros. The video provoked an outrage in the entire Albanian society especially in the ranks of the opposition. Meta's resignation on January 14th was not enough to calm the waters. On January 21st more than 20,000 protesters gathered in front of the Prime Minister's office asking for his resignation. (BBC 2011) In the next hours the protest turned violent with clashes between the police and the protesters. The Republican Guard opened fire killing 4 protesters. (CNN 2011) Moments later in a general confusion the protesters left the main boulevard.

The fragile image of Albania's commitment to the democratization process dissolved in a few weeks. The protest itself was just the beginning of a series of political attacks towards other institutions. Immediately after the protest the General Prosecutor Ina Rama announced a criminal investigation on both the Republican Guard and the organizers of the protest regarding the events of January 21st. President Bamir Topi called for all the parties involved to calm down and keep the peace. His statement was supported by EU delegation in Albania and all foreign embassies. On the other hand, the reaction of Prime Minister Berisha was surprising to say the least. In a furious press conference he put forward allegation of coup d'état against his government. Then his attention turned towards the General Prosecutor who had issued 6 arrest warrants for officials of the Republican Guard. Using a vile language Prime Minister Berisha accused the General Prosecutor for collaborating with the opposition in the coup d'état. (Brady 2011) Nevertheless, the General Prosecutor started the investigation on the events of January 21st and such an investigation is still ongoing. Finally, all the parties managed to keep the situation after the

protest calm and peaceful. However, the international community was shocked at the degree of violence used and warned for negative effects on Albania's European integration prospective. Such a warning was realized in the publications of the SAA progress report and opinion on Albania's application EU membership 2011. In the country conclusions regarding the main challenges of the EU enlargement policy the European Commission states that:

“Overall, Albania has made limited progress in fulfilling the political criteria for membership of the EU. Important EU-related reforms have been hampered by the political stalemate. Progress in addressing the key priorities¹ and the other challenges identified in the Opinion has been uneven. There has been some progress on implementing measures to combat organized crime, on improving the treatment of detained persons in prisons, and on children's rights. However, there was only limited progress regarding the work of parliament, elections, the judiciary, anti-corruption policy, property rights and improving the living conditions of the Roma community. Albania will need to make considerable and sustained efforts on all areas identified in last year's Opinion.” (European Commission 2011)

Albania received a fail mark on all the previous EU recommendations. In fact, the series of obstacles to the democratization process were not passed even with continuous EU support. The effects of the *acquis* adoption, pre accession financial assistance, technical assistance, and EU membership opportunity were overshadowed by a continuous political deadlock, chronic corruption, and problematic separation of powers.

Quantified Democratization

The stagnation created by the above mentioned democratization issues has served as input in for different indexes that try to quantify the quality of democracy in different countries. Perhaps the most famous of these indexes is the Democracy Score Index published yearly by Freedom House. In the period in which the SAA was being enforced, Albania's ratings according to Freedom House were calculated as follows:

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
------	------	------	------	------	------

Electoral Process	3.50	4.00	4.00	3.75	3.75	4.00
Civil Society	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Independent Media	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	4.00	4.00
Local Democratic Governance	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	3.00	3.25
Judicial Framework and Independence	4.25	4.00	4.00	4.25	4.25	4.25
Corruption	5.25	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Democracy Score	3.79	3.82	3.82	3.82	3.93	4.04

(Freedom House 2011)

We have to note that these ratings represent the opinions of Freedom House academic advisers and the local authors and are rooted in a qualitative research of the developments in the democratization process. Thus, a precise conversion in a numerical scale is not possible to achieve. However, these ratings are quite helpful in presenting the trend of democratization. Throughout the years Democracy Scores (as the average of all ratings in the different dimensions) can help us understand whether a country is experiencing an advancement, standstill, or decline in democratic quality. The ratings are based on a scale from 1 to 7 where the 1 score represents the highest level of democratic progress whereas 7 represents the lowest.

From this point of view, the Democracy Score of Albania during the application of the SAA shows a standstill in democratization and in the later years a regress. The three most problematic areas are the elections, independence of the judiciary, and corruption. What is also

interesting is that the civil society who should serve as a watchdog of political actors' actions shows no sign of development. The findings of the Nations in Transition Report state that:

“The civic sector is characterized by problems with continuity of financing and fundamentally donor-driven agendas, is rarely consulted in policymaking (with the exception, to a certain extent, of the visa liberalization process) and has low visibility in public life” (Freedom House 2011)

This conclusion is reaffirmed by UNDP's Institute for Democracy and Mediation in its analysis of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index in 2010. This analysis shows that the performance of the civil society in Albania is impaired by a series of factors where we can mention the donor driven agenda, poor advocacy skills, and underdeveloped dialogue with decision-makers which has resulted in public skepticism on civil society's impact. (Institute for Democracy and Mediation 2010)

The Economist Intelligence Unit with its Democracy Index considers Albania to be a hybrid regime which is defined as more democratic than an authoritarian regime but still not enough to be considered even a flawed democracy. According to the 2011 report, in terms of democracy Albania is listed in the 87 place out of 167 countries very close to Turkey which is a candidate country but in the same group with Venezuela and Palestine. Even though such a grouping can be considered superficial, this Democracy Index shows how the late developments in Albania created a negative perception of the country's democratization process.

International indexes related to democratization point out the same problematic sectors as did the EU progress reports. Thus, democratization in Albania during the SAA enforcement has shifted from advancement to standstill. The Europeanization process and the application of its mechanisms have failed to tackle the issues of political conflict, separation of the state powers, and corruption. If the Europeanization process is to push forward the Albania's democratization process a reformulation of the mechanisms is imperative.

Analysis and Conclusion

Europeanization and democratization are two processes that accompanied the political system in Albania since the fall of the communist regime. They have become an inseparable part of daily political rhetoric. In this dissertation we showed in details the application of Europeanization mechanisms in the context of the EU – Albania Stabilisation and Association Agreement. Moreover, we pointed out the ineffectiveness of EU conditionality in bringing domestic change in the democratization process.

We described in details the application of Europeanization mechanism in Albania within the framework of SAA. We showed that in each of the mechanism there were technical difficulties that lowered their impact on democratization. The transfer of models involves a series of limitation due to the size of the *acquis* and judiciary dependence on the political system and corruption. The pre accession aid funds focus mainly on infrastructural project and neglecting the development of domestic human capacities. Technical Assistance programs are of a short term nature and lack in follow up activities. Monitoring progress reports use a vague language and lack in clear recommendation of desired courses of action. Gate – Keeping coercive power is questioned by its use as a reward even when the required advancement in reforms was not met.

The democratization process since the signing of SAA experienced a stagnation. The dimension of Quality of Democracy either did not improve or in some cases even worsened. Rule of Law has been lacking behind because of the state of the judiciary. Civil Society as the main actor in the Participation dimension has not achieved an active involvement in the decision making process. In term of Competition, each election process in Albania has been considered to be better than the previous one but still not able to fulfill all the required OSCE/ODHIR standards. Horizontal Accountability has experienced ups and downs in an exchange of

cooperation and conflict periods between the Government, Presidency, and General Prosecutor's office. Political Equality has been questioned with the Electoral Code of 2008 which de facto excluded small parties from the parliamentary life decreasing the number of voter's choices. Therefore, in terms of Degree of Europeanization, democratization in Albania falls within the stage of inertia since the transposition of EU led democratization reforms has been continuously delayed.

The reasons for this resistance to change can be found in the Albanian political system. This system is still in the early stages of democratic development and is affected by Albania's singular type of communist heritage (both in leadership as well as norms). In fact, the deep isolation enforced by the communist regime combined with political persecution brought at the beginning of the 1990s a political elite unskilled in liberal oriented policies, hungry for power, and confrontational in nature. If the skills of political elite have developed throughout the transition period its aggressive nature has not. Today the Albanian political system composed of leader focused parties that use a highly violent political discourse. In a personal interview for the purpose of this thesis, a member of the Commission for Integration in the Albanian parliament stated that when we talk about EU Albania relations we must understand the difference in norms and behavior. Albanian politics is a system where the norm is conflict rather than cooperation. The norm is personal attacks rather than debating ideas. The norm is maintenance of power rather than democratization. (A 2012) Democratization is in fact a process that combines structures, policies and especially norms. If European democratic structures and policies are not accompanied by European norms, the entire process stagnates. Conflicting norms is the main reason for the ineffectiveness of the Europeanization process in ensuring democratization.

The EU itself has shifted the attention from the Enlargement Policy to the cleavages created within EU because of the financial crises. The ongoing debate in European structures is whether EU should focus towards consolidation within its members or enlargement. (Szpala 2010) In Albania's case this is reflected in the amount of financial aid. Until 2009, IPA funds allocated to Albania have been increasing considerably with about 10 million Euros each year. In the next years the amount has been kept almost constant. (European Commission 2012) Moreover, the number of visit from EU delegation has decreased. Therefore, Albania needs to be hasty in showing advancements in democratizations and fulfillment of the political criteria for EU membership.

Finally, the current application of Europeanization mechanisms does not leave much space of maneuver for the EU. Until now the focus has been on creation of governmental agencies, infrastructural development, and technical support. If the mechanisms are to be effective realignment towards the development of human resources is imperative.

All political parties in Albania see the integration into EU structures as the only possible prospective and all political parties show non – democratic norms. Thus, an important factor in Albania's democratization process could be civil society. A shift of EU's priorities to the creation of a strong and active civil society could in fact create a source of internal pressure towards democratization. Thus an indirect application of Europeanization mechanisms with the aim of creating internal pressure for change may be the answer to its effectiveness on the democratization process in Albania. The courses of action aimed at strengthening Albania's civil society as a promoter of democratization is an interesting field for further research.

Bibliography

Books and Articles

Anastasakis, Othon. "The Europeanization of the Balkans." *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 12, no. 1 (2001): 77-88.

Beetham, David. *Defining and Measuring Democracy*. London: Sage, 1994.

Börzel, Tanja, and Thomas Risse. "Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe." In *The politics of Europeanization*, by Kevin Featherstone and Claudio Radaelli, 55–78. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Bryman, Alan. *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*. London: Routledge, 1998.

—. *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Cowles, Mario, Thomas Risse, and James Caporaso. *Europeanization and Domestic Change: Transforming Europe*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.

Daci, Jordan. "The European integration of the Albanian legal system." *ICBS*, 2008.

Dahl, Robert. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971.

Diamond, Larry, and Leonardo Morlino. "Introduction." In *Assessing the Quality of Democracy*, by Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino, ix-xliii. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005.

Elbasani, Arolda. "EU Administrative Conditionality and Domestic Downloading: The Limits of Europeanization in Challenging Contexts." *KFG Working Paper 2* (2009).

Gerring, John. *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Gerring, John. "What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good for?" *American Political Science Review* (American Political Science Association) 98, no. 02 (2004): 341-354.

- Grabbe, Heather. *The Transformative Power of the EU: Europeanization Through Conditionality in Central and Eastern Europe*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Greene, Jennifer C, Valerie J Caracelli, and Wendy F Graham. "Toward a Conceptual Framework for Mixed-Method Evaluation Designs." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 11 (1989): 255-274.
- Guy, Peters, B. *Comparative Politics: Theory and Methods*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- Haerpfer, Christian W. "Post-Communist Europe and Post-Soviet Russia." In *Democratization*, by Christian W Haerpfer, Patrick Bernhagen, Ronald F Inglehart and Christian Welzel. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Héritier, Adrienne. *Differential Europe - New Opportunities and Restrictions for Policy Making in Member States*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.
- Hoffmann, Judith. "Integrating Albania: The Role of the European Union in the Democratization Process." *Albania Journal of Politics* 1 (2005): 58-59.
- Huntington, Samuel P. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.
- Jarvis, Christopher. "The Rise and Fall of Albania's Pyramid Schemes." *Finance and Development* 37, no. 1 (2000): 46-49.
- Kadare, Ismail. "Dealing a blow to the dictatorship." *Transition* 1, no. 20 (1995): 64.
- Kajsiu, Blendi, Aldo Bumçi, and Albert Rakipi. *Albania - A weak State a weak Democracy*. Tirana: Albanian Institute for International Relations, 2003.
- Keyman, Fuat E, and Duzgit Senem A. "Europeanization, Democratization and Human Rights in Turkey." *Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies*, 2006.
- Kohler-Koch, Beate. "European networks and ideas: Changing national policies?" *European Integration online Papers* 6 (2002).

- Kurzman, Charles. "Waves of democratization." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 33, no. 1 (1998): 42-64.
- Linz, Juan J, and Alfred Stepan. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- March, James, and Johan Olsen. "The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Orders." *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 943-69.
- Marsh, David, and Gerry Stoker. *Theory and Methods in Political Science*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002.
- McFaul, Michael. "The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World." *World Politics* 54, no. 2 (2002).
- O'Donnell, Guillermo. "Illusions about Consolidation." *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 2 (1996): 34 - 51.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo. "The Perpetual Crises of Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 1 (2007): 5-11.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo. "Why the Rule of Law Matters." In *Assessing the Quality of Democracy*, by Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino, 3-17. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005.
- Powell, Bingham. "The Chain of Responsiveness." In *Assessing the Quality of Democracy*, by Larry Diamond and Diamond Morlino, 62-76. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005.
- Pridham, Geoffrey. *Prospects for democratic consolidation in East-Central Europe*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001.
- Radaelli, Claudio. "The Europeanization of Public Policies – Understanding Idiosyncratic Mechanisms and Contingent Results." *European Integration online Papers (EIoP)*, 2003.

Radealli, Claudio M. "Whither Europeanization? Concept stretching and substantive change." *European Integration online Papers (EIoP)* 4 (2000).

Reuschmeyer, Dietrich. "Addressing Inequality." In *Assessing the Quality of Democracy*, by Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino, 47-61. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005.

Sandrin, Paula. "The European Union as a vincolo esterno and the transformation of Turkish foreign policy." *ECPR Graduate Conference*. Dublin: The European Consortium for Political Research, 2010.

Schedler, Andreas. "Measuring Democratic Consolidation." *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 2001: 66-92.

Schimmelfennig, Frank. "International socialization in central and eastern Europe: a strategic perspective." *International Studies Association Convention*. Chicago, 2001.

Schimmelfennig, Frank, and Ulrich Sedelmeier. *The Europeanization Of Central And Eastern Europe*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2005.

Sedelmeier, Ulrich. "Accommodation beyond self-interest? Identity, policy paradigms and the limits of a rationalist approach to EU policy towards Central Europe." *Politique Européenne* 3 (2001): 13-37.

Szpala, Marta. "The Western Balkans: Deadlock in the EU enlargement process." *Center for Eastern Studies* 43 (November 2010).

Tripodi, Paolo. "Operation Alba: A Necessary and Successful Preventive Deployment." *International Peacekeeping* 9, no. 4 (2002): 89-104.

Vachudova, Milada Anna. "Democratization in Postcommunist Europe: Illiberal Regimes and the Leverage of International Actors." *Center for European Studies Working Paper Series*, no. 139 (2006).

Vurmo, Gjergji. *Relations of Albania with the EU*. Study, Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation, 2008.

Yengoyan, Aram A. *Modes of Comparison: Theory and Practice*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006.

Yin, Robert K. *Case Study Research: Designs and methods*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications Inc., 1989.

Zanga, Louis. "Albania Reduced to Total dependence on Foreign Food." . Vol. 1, No. 8. 21st February 1992." *RFE/RL Research Reports* 1, no. 8 (1992).

Reports and other Sources

A, Interviewee, interview by Bruci and Ergys. *How does Europeanization affect Democratization in Albania* (January 7, 2012).

Albanian Helsinki Committee. *Some Preliminary Data on the Progress of the Electoral Process on February 18, 2007*. Tirana: Albanian Helsinki Committee, 2007.

Albanian Institute for International Studies. *The European Perspective of Albania - Perceptions and Realities 2011*. Annual Report, Tirana: Instituti i Studimeve Ndërkombëtare, 2011.

BBC. *Election row spills into Albania's streets*. Tirana, May 3, 2010.

BBC. *Three killed as Albanian police clash with protesters*. Tirana, January 21, 2011.

Brady, Matt. *Turmoil in Albania Offers Lessons for Mideast*. Tirana, February 7, 2011.

Casaca, Paulo. "WRITTEN QUESTION by Paulo Casaca (PSE) to the Commission." *European Parliament*. October 21, 2008. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+WQ+E-2008-5712+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> (accessed April 17, 2012).

Ceka, Neritan, Ilir Meta, Nard Ndoka, Shehi Dashamir, Paskal Milo, and Petro Koçi. "Open Letter to the European Commission." Tirana, October 29, 2009.

Central Electoral Committee. *Final Results of the Parliamentary Elections on a National Scale*. Tirana: Central Electoral Committee of Albania, 2009.

CNN. *January 21 2011 Protests in Albania*. Tirana, January 21, 2011.

Council of Europe. "PACE leaders urge the Albanian parties to end the current political crisis ." *Council of Europe, Office in Tirana*. February 23, 2010.

<http://www.coe.al/index.php?faqe=content/detail&kat=news&id=656&mnu=0&PHPSESSID=5a13757bf55abbef2ae73b8df387e520&lng=en&PHPSESSID=5a13757bf55abbef2ae73b8df387e520> (accessed April 18, 2012).

Council of the European Union. *General Affairs and External Relations*. Press Release, Luxembourg: Council of the European Union, 2006.

Council of the European Union. *Visa liberalisation for Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Agreement, Brussels: Council of the European Union, 2010.

European Commission. *Albania 2006 Progress Report*. Progress Report, Brussels: European Commission, 2006.

European Commission. "Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Republic of Albania, on trade and commercial and economic cooperation." *Official Journal of the European Communities*. Brussels: European Commission, November 25, 1992.

European Commission. *Albania - 2005 Progress Report*. Progress Report, Brussels: European Commission, 2005.

—. "Albania - Financial Assistance." *European Commission - Enlargement*. 2012.

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/potential-candidates/albania/financial_en.htm (accessed March 16, 2012).

European Commission. *Albania 2008 Progress Report*. Progress Report, Brussels: European Commission, 2008.

European Commission. *Albania 2011 Progress Report*. Progress Report, Brussels: European Commission, 2011.

European Commission. *Albania Stabilization and Association Report 2003*. Progress Report, Brussels: European Commission, 2003.

European Commission. *Commission Opinion on Albania's application for membership of the European Union*. Opinion, Brussels: European Commission, 2010.

European Commission. *Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2011-2012*. Brussels: European Commission, 2011.

—. "EU-Western Balkans Summit - Declaration." *European Commission*. June 21, 2003.
http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accession_process/how_does_a_country_join_the_eu/sap/thessaloniki_summit_en.htm (accessed January 20, 2012).

European Commission. *IPA National Programme for Albania under the Transition Assistance and Institution Building Component for 2009*. Brussels: European Commission, 2009.

European Commission. *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 Stabilization and Association Agreement with Albania*. Progress Report, Brussels: European Commission, 2001.

European Commission. *Report from the Commission: On the feasibility of negotiating a Stabilization and Association Agreement with Albania*. Feasibility Study, Brussels: European Commission, 1999.

European Commission. *Technical Assistance Information Exchange Instrument 2004 Activity Report*. Activity Report, Brussels: European Commission, 2004.

European Commission. *Technical Assistance Information Exchange Instrument 2005 Activity Report*. Activity Report, Brussels: European Commission, 2005.

European Commission. *Technical Assistance Information Exchange Instrument Activity Report*. Activity Report, Brussels: European Commission, 2010.

—. "Zagreb Summit 24 November 2000." *European Commission*. November 24, 2000.
http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accession_process/how_does_a_country_join_the_eu/sap/zagreb_summit_en.htm (accessed January 18, 2012).

European Council. *Council Regulation (EC) No 1085/2006 of 17 July 2006 establishing an Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)*. Regulation, Brussels: European Council, 2006.

European Movement Albania. *Assessing Integration: Problems and Solutions to Adapting IPA in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia*. Monitoring Report, Tirana: European Movement Albania, 2010.

European Parliament. "Santa Maria de Feira European Council." *European Parliament*. June 19, 2000. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/fei1_en.htm (accessed January 18, 2012).

Freedom House. *Nations in Transit 2011*. Washington D.C.: Freedom House, 2011.

Freedom House. *Nations in Transit: Albania*. Washington D.C.: Freedom House, 2004.

Government of Albania. *National Plan for the Implementation of the SAA 2007 - 2012*. Action Plan, Tirana: Government of Albania, 2007.

Institute for Democracy and Mediation. *Civil Society Index Analytical Country Report for Albania: In Search of Citizens and Impact*. Analytical Report, Tirana: UNDP, 2010.

Koha Jone. "Members of Parliament go into hunger strike." Tirana: Koha Jone, November 11, 2008.

Ministry of Integration. *EU - Albania Relations*. 2010. <http://www.mie.gov.al/> (accessed February 15, 2012).

Moniquet, Claude. *Albania: When a Reform of the Electoral Code Weakens Democracy*. Background Note, Paris: European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center, 2008.

Open Europe. *Just how big is the acquis communautaire?* Briefing Note, London: Open Europe, 2005.

OSCE. *Observations on the Parliamentary Elections Held in the Republic of Albania May 26 and June 2 1996*. Vienna: Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 1996.

OSCE. *Republic of Albania, Local Elections 18 February 2007, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report*. Election Report, Warsaw: Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2007.

OSCE. *Republic of Albania, Parliamentary Elections 28 June 2009, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report*. Election Report, Tirana: Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2009.

OSCE. *Republic of Albania, Parliamentary elections 3 July 2005, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report*. Warsaw: Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2005.

Parliament of Albania. *Electoral Code of the Republic of Albania*. Tirana: Center for Official Publications, 2003.

—. *Electoral Code of the Republic of Albania*. Tirana: Center for Official Publications, 2008.

Prodi, Romano. "A Wider Europe – A Proximity Policy as the Key to Stability." *The sixth ECSC – World Conference*. Brussels: Jean Monnet Project, 2002.

Rehn, Olli. "Answer given by Mr Rehn on behalf of the Commission." *European Parliament*. November 27, 2008. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-2008-5712&language=EN> (accessed April 17, 2012).

The Economist. *Albania's political deadlock: Dancing, but not moving*. Tirana, June 10, 2010.

USAID. *Corruption in Albania: 2010 Survey*. Survey, Tirana: USAID, 2010.

Venice Commission. *Opinion on the Amendments to the COstitution of the Republic of Albania*. Opinion, Strasbourg: Venice Commission, 2008.