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Albanian integration into the UE : security, Europeanization, democratization: which project for the democracy?

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Keywords :

Albania, EU integration, democratization, elites, conditionality, security.

Abstract

The prevailing political doctrine seems to be that the integration of the Western Balkans within the EU and NATO can help to achieve stability in Europe. It is also considered as the means to build a security community in the Balkans. However, these two objectives meet obstacles both at the regional and national levels.

Our objective is to analyze the main actors' interests and the relationships between Europeanization and democratization, by focusing on Albania. The study is based on a series of interviews with Albanian elites in December 2010.

At the national level Albania is under pressure to satisfy the imposed conditionality issues. As it turns out democratization seems to be difficult to achieve given its turbulent history and the current diverging political objectives pursued by the different groups. Regarding democratization, the key reforms addressing constitutional, electoral and judicial issues are stuck. This explains in part why the implementation of European norms is difficult. Sometimes this results from diverging interpretations. Furthermore no enforcement measures are planned whereas other important norms remain ignored.

Thus, on the one hand at the national level the difficulties concerning the democratization process result from the diverging attitudes of the elites as confirmed by the political crisis January 2011. On the other hand, the EU seems to give more priority to stability and security issues than to democratic ones. From the interviews it appears that the EU does not seem to require from Albania the same democracy standards as it does for its Member States¹.

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Introduction :

The Western Balkans' integration within the EU is an important political and strategic issue. Additionally it is more than ever a European matter of concern. Moreover, it allows the EU to assert its role as a global actor in the international arena. Even if according to some authors, the EU agenda in the Balkans has moved from security to accession (ISS, Rupnik 2011: 17), the connection between the Western Balkans' integration and the European continent's security remains important. The recent events in the North of Kosovo in July 2011 have shown that the EU cannot ignore the risks implied by security issues in the Balkan region while continuing to implement its enlargement policy. For some authors, the integration into the European Union is a means for the security of the European continent (Buzan and Weaver 2003: 356, 361²). Therefore, the construction of a solid European security community relies on a sustainable integration process of the Western Balkans. The European Commission has also recalled this security objective of the integration process in its recent Enlargement Strategy published on November 9th, 2010: "The EU's enlargement process contributes to stability in Europe and to the security and well-being of its citizens."³

In addition, the democratization of the Western Balkans is an essential objective of the integration process. Indeed, the Europeanization process is partly dedicated to this goal, as confirmed by the Enlargement Strategy documents. Europeanization scholars on the CEE countries also assert this issue :

"Human rights, liberal democracy, and the rule of law are the fundamental rules of legitimate statehood in the European Union (EU). They are the core conditions that states have to fulfill before they are allowed to enter into accession negotiations and are expected to adopt the specific rules of the *acquis communautaire*. "Political conditionality" is the core strategy of the EU to promote these fundamental rules." (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005 : 29).

Thus security, integration process and democratization are connected and depend on each other.

However, despite the stated aims, Europeanization does not necessarily involve democratization even though the measures on democracy consolidation, reinforcement of rule of law are the core of this process. The Western Balkan countries go through different stages regarding their Europeanization and democratization processes and their accession statuses reflect their progresses towards their EU membership. However, Albania's evolution is quite different from the other countries of the region. Indeed, the democratization process in Albania is one of the most difficult ones given its tumultuous historical legacy, its difficult economical situation and above all, given its extreme domestic political polarization. That's the reason why Albania, even though it is part of the

² Buzan, B., et O. Waever. *Regions and powers: the structure of international security*. Cambridge Univ Pr, 2003, 564 p.

³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2010-2011, Brussels, 9.11. 2010, COM(2010) 660, <http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2010/package/strategy_paper_2010_en.pdf> , p. 2

Western Balkans, has not been analyzed in the very recent study of the Institute for Security Studies published in June 2011 on the Western Balkans and the EU: "the hour of Europe ". Furthermore few studies deal with the Europeanization and democratization process in this country.

According to some scholars, Albania should have belonged to the Western Balkan group of countries having the EU candidate status like the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro (ISS, Rupnik 2011 : 22). But the actual extreme political life polarization in Albania is detrimental to the country and to its accession project to the EU:

"Candidate status has been granted to FYROM and Montenegro, but postponed for Albania: it is not self-evident to invite a country whose June 2009 election results have still not been recognised by the opposition. The extreme and violent political polarisation has brought parliamentary life to a halt and the country to the verge of its worst crisis since the financial pyramid scandal of 1997"(Rupnik 2011 : 22).

The consolidation of democracy in Albania is essential for the country in order to join the EU. The country has made important progress on this issue, which has been confirmed by the European Commission annual progress reports. However Albania still meets significant obstacles on its way to Europeanization and democratization.

Even though the current political situation is extremely polarized, for us it is crucial to analyze the situation in Albania (we adopt here a different position from Rupnik 2011). In fact we wish to address the question of the relationship between democratization and integration in Albania in order to evaluate the democratic process of this country. We address the question of the nature of the democratization process in Albania and of the Europeanization's impact on this process.

The study is based on primary sources and on the results that we have obtained from the interviews with some Albanian elites and international observers in Albania we conducted during December 2010. This inquiry was on their perception of the EU integration process. We interviewed 13 representatives of the Albanian elite and two officials from the EU and the OSCE.

In order to address the problem we have stated above, we propose to analyze the following points:

First, if the EU influences the democratization process by the means of Europeanization, it is not the only actor impacting this process in Albania. In fact, the democratic process which started after the fall of the communist regime relies above all on domestic political factors as argued in particular by Albanian scholars:

"EU political conditionality, based on specific criteria and operating through a system of monitoring related to the highly appreciated award of membership has a distinguished leverage compared to other European protagonists. The degree to which democracy is internalised, however, depends on the domestic factors within a country that shape, circumscribe and/or instrumentalise democratic norms." (Elbasani 2004: 25).

This contribution focuses on the influence of the EU and the domestic actors on the democratization process in Albania. We notably address the question of the effectiveness of democratization.

Furthermore, we think that it's important for the EU to continue using its leverage through the mechanism of conditionality and through the accession prospect in order to lead the Western Balkan countries to further consolidate their democracy and carry out their reforms. Literature has more focused on the European institutional impact on the Western Balkans, rather than the Balkan countries' point of view on the EU integration (Subotic 2011). Yet, this aspect is essential to help us understand this process given the important influence played by the domestic level on the integration process itself (Saurugger 2009: 258-259). That's the reason why we pay particular

attention to the Albanian elite's perception of the integration process. We deal here with the nature of Europeanization and its impact in Albania.

Finally, the process of democratization and Europeanization in Albania do not always coincide. Also, the domestic and international actors do not share the same role in the democratization process. Indeed, democratization began before the Europeanization but the latter has a positive influence on the former. Notwithstanding, Europeanization does not necessarily involve the consolidation of the democracy. This is not either the case for domestic reasons due to the country and its political actors; or for international ones due to some lack of effective use of conditionality by the EU. But Europeanization without democratization would be an empty shell since democracy and the rule of law are core values that the EU remains deeply attached. The candidate status refusal to Albania might be seen as an EU signal to the country towards more democratization. However, visas liberalization and some other EU decisions might show that the EU is not enough demanding towards Albanian political actors on democratization issues.

For all these reasons, we decided to analyze the process of democratization and Europeanization separately. However, we will show all along our contribution, that the links between them are essential. Thus, initially, we analyze the process of democratization, that is to say, the internal and external factors that influence this process (section I). Afterwards we focus on the Europeanization process where we also analyze the role played by internal and external "stakeholders" (section II).

Before analyzing these processes, we first define the concepts of Europeanization and democratization that we use in this paper.

We chose a broad definition of Europeanization, following Claudio Radaelli. For this author, the concept of Europeanization refers to:

"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 making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies" (2001: 108).

According to Sabine Saurugger (2009: 258-259), this definition includes different actors, instruments and levels. It is "circular" and not linear as it includes "the construction of the European integration (*uploading*) as well as the influence of the integration process over the national level (*downloading*), and the latter influence once again the European integration (*uploading*)". The last aspect has been under-theorized. Here Europeanization coincides more with the integration process. However, for our purposes and especially when we look at the reforms' implementation on democracy and the rule of law, we also use a narrower conception of Europeanization. Here the latter is "a process where states adopt EU rules" (Schimmelfennig Sedelmeyer 2005: 7). The broad and narrow aspects of Europeanization that we both use in this contribution are not contradictory and are useful to our findings.

The issues of democracy and democratization have been continuously reviewed and reconsidered in the social sciences for a long time and from different angles. We chose an approach that allows us to better understand the situation in the Western Balkans in general and in Albania in particular.

In 1993, at the Copenhagen European Council, the EU took a decisive step, agreeing that "the associated countries in Central and Eastern Europe that so desire shall become members of the

European Union.”⁴. Meanwhile the Council defined the membership criteria, often referred to as the ‘Copenhagen criteria’:

“The European Council today agreed that the associated countries in Central and Eastern Europe that so desire shall become members of the European Union. Accession will take place as soon as an associated country is able to assume the obligations of membership by satisfying the economic and political conditions required. Membership requires that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union.”⁵

Democratization is required as part of EU integration and is referred to as the consolidation of democracy, the stability and the reinforcement of the democratic institutions and the rule of law. We focus now on the overview given by Christian Welzel on the different theories of democratization where he states:

“Democratization can be understood in three different ways. For one, it is the introduction of democracy in a non-democratic regime. Next, democratization can be understood as the deepening of the democratic qualities of given democracies. Finally, democratization involves the question of the survival of democracy. Technically speaking, the emergence, the deepening, and the survival of democracy are strictly distinct aspects of democratization”(Welzel 2009: 75).

This definition follows quite the same logic as that of Geoffrey Pridham, Eric Herring, George Sanford for whom:

“Democratisation' is seen as the overall process of regime change from beginning to end, including both stages of what are generally called in the comparative literature 'transition' to a liberal or constitutional democracy and its subsequent 'consolidation'”. (1997 : 1-2)

It seems that Albania, while it has started the early phases of transition, is still having difficulties in reaching the final stages of consolidation (Bogdani and Loughin 2007).

I. The long and difficult democratization for internal and external reasons, but essential to the accomplishment of a stable and a sustainable EU integration

The democratization process in Albania began following the end of the dictatorship in 1991. The country managed to organize its first free elections in 1992. Ever since the democratization process has met serious obstacles and has been particularly long because of domestic and international factors. To summarize the process of democratization in Albania we quote Bogdani and Loughin who are among the few authors who recently worked on the relations between the EU and Albania.

“Analysing the political situation, it is clear that Albania is far from a fully democratic system. There are still big challenges in terms of political and government stability, good governance, reinforcing democracy and ensuring free and fair elections, respecting and enforcing the rule of law, upholding human rights, developing a sound judicial system and public administration and an independent media » (2007: 85).

The current situation, despite 20 years of experience in democratic transformations, does not seem to go in the direction of successful democratization. Indeed, the obstacles to this process are largely due to domestic political actors. The EU current pressure on the country, regarding the conditionality policy, does not either seem to be an important means for democratization at the level where it could be.

⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accesion_process/criteria/index_en.htm>

⁵ European Council in Copenhagen - 21-22 June 1993- Conclusions Of The Presidency , DOC/93/3, 22/06/1993, <<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=DOC/93/3&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>>

1. THE DIFFICULT LEGACIES OF THE PAST AND THE EXTREME POLARIZATION OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION

a. Difficult legacies of the past

The turbulent past of Albania has left a legacy with serious damage to the democratization process. First, the political legacy (Bogdani and Loughlin 2007: 22-26) is a real obstacle. Albania has experienced the toughest and longest communist dictatorship of the Communist bloc that isolated the country for over 46 years from the rest of the world. Albania went even further than China by abolishing all forms of private property and by prohibiting any form of freedom of cult. The almost total isolation since 1978 plunged the country into a real paranoia leaving a legacy of political passivity as the Albanians had no other references than those given to them by the regime. Also what has distinguished the Albanian elite from the ones in the CEECs is that the Albanian intellectuals were not the first to challenge the regime because they were afraid of retaliation. Bogdani and Loughlin argue that:

“This is important as the lack of a democratic liberal elite and dissident intellectual groups as initiators and leaders of the democratic movement is one of the features distinguishing Albania from other CEE countries.” (2007: 22).

Indeed, the students and youth were the first who demanded political pluralism and the abandonment of communist symbols.

Even before the establishment of the communist regime, Albania did not have much experience neither with a long and sustainable democracy nor with a real political pluralism. But above all it is its current political situation that constitutes a great obstacle in the path of its democratization process.

b. The context of the current extreme political polarization

The European Commission published its progress report on Albania in November 2010. On the same date, it gave its opinion on the Albanian membership application filed on April 23, 2010. The Commission denied the candidate status to the country and asked Albania to meet 12 criteria before considering further accession negotiations. Important criteria relating to the consolidation of democracy and the reinforcement of the rule of law are required⁶. Albania thus, continues to have the status of potential candidate. The EU often draws the Albanian attention on the country's political deadlock due to the extreme polarization of political life.

Indeed, Albania has experienced a deep political crisis in 2010. At the root of this crisis are the parliamentary elections of June 2009 whose legitimacy was contested by the opposition Socialist Party (SP). The latter requested a recount, which was rejected by the winning party. After the elections, the Democratic Party (DP) was elected by concluding an alliance for obtaining the majority with the Socialist Movement for Integration (*LSI Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim*) whose leader is Ilir Meta. The latter was appointed Deputy Prime Minister in the government of Sali Berisha, the current Prime Minister. The opposition boycotted the parliamentary process to make their voices heard from September 2009 to May-June 2010. In May 2010, the SP organized a hunger strike that lasted 19 days. This has plunged the country into a deep crisis and the most important reforms on the electoral, judicial and constitutional issues are blocked. The European Union has tried several times

⁶Commission staff working document analytical report, Communication from the commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Commission opinion on Albania's application for membership of the European Union, Brussels, 09 november 2010, <http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2010/package/al_rapport_2010_en.pdf>

to play a mediating role in this crisis by inviting political leaders to find a solution in negotiating with each-other. Under the EU pressure the SP decided to return to the Parliament but it has continued to boycott the parliamentary work from time to time. The European Parliament delegation's intervention on November 2010 in order to reach a compromise among the political forces was unsuccessful, because both parties remained on their own positions.

On November 8, 2010, EU decides to grant Albania visa liberalization. This decision is considered as a great success by the ruling party. This liberalization is effective since December 15, 2010.

The very complicated political situation got worse by January 14, 2011 as the result of the resignation of the Deputy Prime Minister, Ilir Meta. He resigned after a national TV channel released a video showing him negotiating illegal commissions. Following this resignation, demonstrations were organized by the opposition to demand the government resignation. The first demonstration of January 21, 2011 turned into a tragedy: three demonstrators were killed by the police and several dozen people were injured. The international community called for calm. On January 25, the special European envoy sent by Brussels, Miroslav Lajčák, came to Albania in an attempt to mediate between the government and the opposition. He called for the end of the violence and tensions. He also invited the political leaders to put an end to the political crisis and to continue their way towards the EU integration.

On May 8, 2011 were held the municipal elections. They opposed, for the city of Tirana, the incumbent mayor Edi Rama, leader of the Socialist Party and the former interior minister Lulzim Basha, supported by Sali Berisha. The latter candidate was given the winner. The SP contested the election results and complained to the Central Election Commission on the grounds of election irregularities. The Commission, almost two months after, declared the candidate from the DP as the winner of the municipal election in Tirana. The SP then appealed to the Electoral College who confirmed the decision of the previous Commission in early July 2011. The EU concerned by the political situation in Albania, called for dialogue between political parties. It invited them to require the assistance of the Venice Commission⁷ to assist Albania in order to avoid such problems in the future and to complete its electoral election.

We want to reproduce here parts of the statements of the European authorities since they serve as important indicators for our analysis on democratization and Europeanization in Albania.

Hence, the Council of the European Union adopted the following conclusions on June the 20th 2011:

“[...]the situation in Tirana is a matter of concern. The EU deplores the deterioration of the political situation and increased tensions that followed the elections and conduct of the process. [...] It is also essential for all parties to recognise the supremacy of the Rule of Law over any other interests. The EU calls on all political leaders to support finalisation of the election process calmly, constructively and with a focus on the European future of the country. [...]The EU urges the Government and the opposition, in collaboration with civil society, to agree on a thorough electoral reform, addressing all recommendations by OSCE-ODIHR in 2007, 2009 and 2011 before the next elections are called. [...]The EU calls on the Government and the opposition to urgently restore the political dialogue and overcome the long-standing political stalemate. Such a dialogue is indispensable for the normal functioning of any democratic society and its institutions, including the effective functioning of the Parliament, as well as for the advancement of the country's European integration”⁸.

⁷ “The European Commission for Democracy through Law, better known as the Venice Commission, is the Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional matters. Established in 1990, the commission has played a leading role in the adoption of constitutions that conform to the standards of Europe's constitutional heritage” <http://www.venice.coe.int/site/main/Presentation_E.asp>.

⁸ Council conclusions on Albania, 3101st Foreign Affairs Council meeting Luxembourg, 20 June 2011, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/foraff/122937.pdf >

c. The consequences of the current extreme political polarization

According to Dahl, the extreme social polarization is detrimental to democracy since group polarization is easily transformed into violent fights to monopolize the state (Dahl 1971; Welzel 2008: 79). This polarization is therefore very detrimental to the democratization process in Albania and leads to the deadlock of key reforms necessary for the consolidation of democracy, institution building and rule of law. Hence, the following reforms are still blocked: on public administration, on organization and independence of the judiciary, and on electoral issues. The latter constitutes one of the greatest problems. We focus on the latest reports of EU⁹ and OSCE¹⁰. The reinforcement of the institutions is also required for the protection of human rights, media freedom, property rights reform of etc...

Several Albanian personalities that we interviewed consider that the democratization process is far from being accomplished and that democracy is still suffering from power struggles, and from power concentration in the hands of some people. According to one person interviewed, after the fall of communism, “the polity has not used democracy or its rules as they were actually heard in democratic countries”.

Accordingly, we could wonder whether the democratic forces in Albania are powerful enough and if the country is respectful of democratic standards. It is the question of the effectiveness of democracy which is thus raised (Welzel 2009). The number of scandals in which important politicians are directly involved especially in cases of corruption remains very high despite the fight against this scourge. The last example also involving the Deputy Prime Minister in January is striking in that regard.

Moreover, some scholars argue on the post-90 legacies. They consider that the political actors are the main responsible factors of the democratization process establishment difficulties. These authors go even further in speaking of irresponsible policies:

“[...] the political and economic system of Albania established after the onset of democracy has also been faulty and problematic. [...] it is poor, incompetent and irresponsible political leadership which has been the principal factor that has prevented Albania achieving good results in its attempted reforms.” (Bogdani and Loughlin 2007: 30).

Other scholars consider that the political actors in Albania, as in other former communist countries, use the impact of the EU in the field of democratization as a “rhetorical action”. Democratization seems to be affected by purely political considerations. Arolda Elbasani states:

“the Impact of EU is translated into a consequential logic of using the democratic rhetoric and adopting democratic institutions, which are used and abused by political actors loaded with the legacies bequeathed to them by the ancient regime”. (Elbasani 2004 : 24).

However, these considerations must be qualified with respect to the fact that democratization is a long process in which experimentation and experience play an important role. Giovanni Carbone’s developments on the consequences of democratization are very interesting from this point of view (Carbone 2009). He invites us to be cautious when evaluating a process of democratization. In

⁹ Commission staff working document analytical report, Communication from the commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Commission opinion on Albania 's application for membership of the European Union, Brussels, 09 november 2010.

¹⁰ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Report by the head of the OSCE Presence in Albania to the OSCE Permanent council, 9 september 2010.

particular he underlines the importance of the time factor within the process of democratization. Hence for Carbone:

“Time is a crucial factor: once democratic reforms are adopted, how long does it take for the expected consequences to appear? The short-term impact of democracy may be quite different from its long-term, durable effects. If we are unaware of this, we risk missing what are the arguably the “true” effects of democratization [...]. Rather than simply measuring a country’s level of democracy at any given point in time, therefore one should quantify the “stock of democracy” – or, in other words, the extent of experience with democracy – that the country has accumulated”. (Giovanni Carbone 2009: 126-127).

Thus, for a country like Albania, which has experienced democratization for only about 20 years and has lived one of the most savage dictatorships in Europe, one would think that it could be very ambitious and demanding to ask from Albania the same level of democracy as for the other EU members. Besides, the fact that the EU is positive regarding the democratization progress accomplished by this country in its annual reports, might show that the democratization efforts are somehow sufficient.

However, given the deep deadlock regarding the needed reforms for the country's democratization and given the violence that occurred in the last months, it is crucial to go on keeping the requirement of Albania being compliant with democratic standards. It is essential for the country to complete its democratization process in order to achieve stability and domestic progress and to claim one day the opening of the accession negotiations with the EU. The latter through the process of Europeanization in particular (where conditionality remains an important leverage) and through its political relations with Albania, in more general terms, plays an important role in the process of democratization. Things are more complex as even though the EU has an impact on democratization in Albania, it does not seem to use all the pressure in its power to force political actors to push the democratization process further. These considerations are particularly important and it is urgent to find solutions to the extreme polarization of the political situation as it has plunged the parliamentary life to a halt. It is the country's most important crisis since 1997 (Rupnik 2011: 22).

2. IS EU REQUIRING LOWER DEMOCRATIC STANDARDS FROM ALBANIA?

Whether several international organizations (IO) like NATO, OSCE, Council of Europe, EU, play directly or implicitly an essential role on the Western Balkans democratization process, it is the EU that today occupies the most important place in this region as an international actor. However, it seems that the EU does not require the same level of democratic standards from Albania as it does from its members. We address here the question of the effect of conditionality on democratization.

a. The essential impact of the IOs on the democratization process

The question of international factors influencing domestic transition has been under studied in the literature for a long time. Few empirical studies were conducted on the relationship between international organizations and democratization (Pevenhouse 2002). Indeed, the democracy was considered to be an internal phenomenon and thus, seldom influenced by international actors. Yet, the links between democratization and IOs enlargement such as NATO and EU are clearly important to address. We do not want to dwell on all international organizations involved in the Albanian’s democratization but we focus on the EU impact on this process. However, we want, in a first time, to provide some clarifications on the roles of international organizations in the democratization process and analyze the EU’s role in Albania in a second time.

Pevenhouse considers that liberalization can lead directly to democratization. He focuses on the sociological institutionalism (Finnemore 1996) that explains how national preferences can emanate out of international institutions (Pevenhouse 2002 : 519).

For Pevenhouse (2002), regional organizations are the IOs with the greatest impact on democratization since:

“[...] regional IO’s tend to operate with small numbers and higher levels of interaction than global organizations, causal processes such as socialization, binding, monitoring, and enforcement are more likely in regional organizations. In addition regional IO’s are more likely to possess leverage to pressure member states to democratize as the vast majority of economic and military agreements are made under the auspices of, or to create, regional organizations” (Pevenhouse 2002: 520).

For him, these organizations influence the democratization through diplomatic and economic pressure which, together with the domestic forces, push autocratic regimes to liberalize. Then the IO membership can lead to elites’ acceptance of the liberalization since their interests are better protected during the period of democratization. The elite acquiescence of liberalization can be forced or obtained by the socialization of the elites groups. The author explains that regional IOs implement the process of elites’ socialization by changing their beliefs system. In that way, these elites acquiesce the liberalization and thus the democratization. There are different reasons for the elite socialization. They are notably interested in the accession perspective into the regional IOs and in the guarantees offered by them.

The author deals mainly with business and military elites. The socialization of military elites in Albania, as part of its integration within NATO is important, but further empirical studies need to be made on the country’s democratization by this means. Indeed, the country's accession to NATO is recent and dates from 2009. However, one might think that the country met already several democratic conditions required for its integration into NATO.

However, Pevenhouse does not analyze the socialization of political and cultural elite. Yet, we consider that it is essential to observe the impact of regional IOs on these elites in the Western Balkans since they remain the key actors for regime transformations and democracy consolidation. Pridham defines the national elites more broadly:

“National elites are top post-holders in the largest political, governmental, economic, military, professional, communications and cultural organizations...who are able, by virtue of their authoritative positions in powerful organizations and movements of whatever kind, to affect national political outcomes regularly and substantially” (2000:143-144).

Here we want to present some results from the interviews we conducted with the Albanian elite and international observers on the EU role on democratization. In particular, we met with political leaders of the government and opposition, with representatives of civil society, journalists, researchers and other experts. It was also essential to meet the key international actors in the process of democratization and we met EU and OSCE officials in Albania. Let us now examine the role of the EU.

b. The EU integration prospect and the EU role on the Albanian democratization process: a lesser democracy requirement in Albania?

As we recalled previously, the consolidation of democracy and the reinforcement of the rule of law in the Western Balkans is an essential precondition for EU integration.

First, after the fall of the dictatorship, it was the United States that played an important geopolitical role in Albania and in the Balkan region. The EU presence was rather shy during this period and it was after the Kosovo's conflict that the EU decided to take the lead in the region.

For the International Commission on the Balkans, the cooperation between Americans and Europeans is essential in order to build peace and democracy in the Balkans (Unfinished peace: report of the International Commission on the Balkans 1996). The Commission considered that the foreign policy of Albania has been much influenced by the United States (125). Indeed, the EU stepped in last minute as part of Operation ALBA in 1997 when the civil war took place. This mission almost did not even take place if it were not for Italy, which took the initiative to be in charge with it¹¹. Following the Kosovo War, the EU decided to build a Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) and actually plays a role in the Balkans. The United States have gradually withdrawn from the region as they were more concerned with Irak and Middle East issues. It was not until 2006 that Albania signed the SAA¹² that entered into force in 2009. Since then it has carried out a more contractual relationship with the EU.

Furthermore, as we have mentioned previously scholars consider that EU plays a leading role in the democratization of the Western Balkan countries. According to these authors, the EU impacts the democracy in Eastern Europe as following: in providing the new democracies with support mechanisms; in using the membership prospect as a carrot to encourage political reform; and in strengthening the EU conditionality. For these authors the EU integration has led to the political and economic reforms implementation whereas for others the role of the EU is further assumed than asserted (Elbasani 2004: 25). Moreover, for some other authors, the developments in Albania show that the idea shared by many Albanian researchers and EU officials that the prospect of integration can lead to the reforms and changes needed is too optimistic (Hoffmann 2005: 70).

Finally, for some international observers and national electoral reform experts that we interviewed in Albania, the democratic standards required as part of the integration of Albania are relatively low. The Head of Rule of Law and Human Rights Department of the OSCE Presence in Albania we interviewed made the following statement:

"I think the criteria decided by the EU for the integration of Albania were rather low. Even these criteria are not fulfilled. The level of democracy that is required here is relatively low compared to what would be expected of the EU member states, including the new members besides Romania and Bulgaria. The fact that such things are accepted here or the fact that such a low level has been admitted even for the negotiations show that there is a wish (talking about the EU) to integrate the Western Balkans more generally. This is more for security reasons of the region rather than checking that each State here enjoys a political and economic system in accordance with the EU. This is also reflected in the speeches of people working for the European Union Delegation here. Of course they speak of democracy, the rule of law, they also speak in Brussels, but do not decide more or less that things should be adopted and find ways to get there"

The main democratization problems are met in particular when adopting EU rules, that is to say, the Europeanization process. This is what we intend to analyze as part of our second section. But beforehand, we would like to highlight the risks requiring "less democracy" in Albania.

¹¹ See the Rand Corporation Report, 2008, From the Balkans to the Congo, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG722.pdf >

¹² Stabilisation and Association Agreement

c. The lower demanding democratic standards consequences in Albania

For the OSCE official we interviewed in Albania the dangers when requiring “less democracy” in Albania are as following:

“We could see the dangers with what happened in Romania and Bulgaria, that is to say that the states joined the European Union and immediately afterwards came back to some previous standards which means that they did not keep everything they achieved. The danger also exists here if Albania begins to do what it takes to join the European Union, and it accepts all the *acquis communautaire* without implementing it, which would be the main danger”.

Democratic institutions and democratic standards are among the very foundations of the state. Non-compliance to these standards can sometimes cause the State collapse. Albania already experienced such a threat in 1997 with pyramid firms collapse, civil war and anarchy that lasted several months. Diligence on these fundamental prerequisites of the state would result in endangering the very project of integration and stability of the region. It is the weakness of state that constitutes a real threat to security in the Balkans, so that is argued by some authors:

“[...] But questions about borders, political status, and international guarantees do not exhaust the security concerns of citizens in Balkan countries. The most likely risk facing the region involves not full-dress warfare but state collapse. State weakness, not armed aggression, is the major security threat today” (Krastev 2002: 46).

Yet, the deep political crisis the country is getting through recalls this danger hanging over the still fragile democratic institutions of the country. Hence the consolidation of democracy must remain the main objective of the EU.

For some authors the EU faces a major dilemma on the Albanian integration issue: should it offer to Albania additional incentives or should it “stick to its conditionality and abandon negotiations or assistance if the slow pace of reforms continues?” The EU has always preferred to maintain the relationships it has already established and therefore it hardly uses coercion. But this should not lead to put the credibility of conditionality in danger because it would deprive the EU of an important lever (Hoffmann 2005: 70-71) particularly in democratization issues.

We have analyzed how the process of democratization in Albania meets serious obstacles on its way from an internal and external point of view. Political actors remain the main protagonists in this area, that is to say, they have the responsibility to lead the country out of the political deadlock and to continue their efforts in consolidating democracy. The EU for its part plays an important role in the context of democratization through the process of Europeanization. We analyze now the impact of this process and the interactions between the Albanian political actors and the EU.

II. The difficult Europeanization for internal and external reasons, but essential to the establishment of a sustainable democracy

Europeanization meets also significant difficulties in Albania. The causes are both internal and external, but the development of the country’s democratization depends also on the success of the Europeanization process.

1. THE EU AND THE EFFECTIVES OF EUROPEANIZATION IN ALBANIA

As we have already mentioned, Albania was denied the status of candidate in November 2010. It must meet 12 criteria set by the last EU progress report in November 2010 as part of the EU conditionality policy before Albania enters into negotiations to become a candidate. One of the

essential requirements is about the compliance with the Copenhagen political criteria, and in particular with the demand for democratic consolidation. Does the Europeanization, by the means of conditionality, allow a better democratization in Albania?

The EU Commission claims on this aspect seem contradictory to some extent especially when one considers the deep political crisis that Albania is going through. Before explaining this point, we want to present some theoretical considerations on Europeanization which would allow us to better understand the situation in Albania.

a. Theoretical framework on Europeanization

We gave a broad definition of Europeanization as in the introduction. Here, we focus on more technical aspects of this process to better understand the EU rule adoption in Albania. We particularly discuss about democracy and human rights.

We rely on theories and empirical applications developed by Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier presented in their book on the Europeanization of CEECs :

“We define “Europeanization” as a process in which states adopt EU rules. [...] The “rules” in question cover a broad range of issues and structures and are both formal and informal. [...] By analyzing rule adoption, we focus on the institutionalization of EU rules at the domestic level – for instance, the transposition of EU law into domestic law, the restructuring of domestic institutions according to the EU rules; or the change of domestic political practices according to EU standards.” (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005 : 7).

First, the authors consider that the EU policy is often described as a policy of conditionality. However the impact of conditionality is more asserted than studied carefully. The lack of conceptual analysis on conditionality is especially striking when we look at the great normative debate on the degree of desire of the EU influence in the CEECs. For some authors, the EU is seen as a colonial power whose actions go against the economic and democratic development of the CEEC. For others, the influence of the EU is much more positive as it would push the CEECs political and economic reforms further. This would constitute an advantage over other countries in transition. For some other scholars, the EU would have the moral obligation to use its leverage to encourage the development of human rights and democracy. All these authors take for granted the fact that the EU is omnipresent in the CEEC. This viewpoint is also shared by journalists and politicians (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005 : 2-3).

Furthermore, the authors focus on institutionalist theories. There exist different forms of rule adoption “based on the different conceptions of norms discussed in the literature on international institutions”:

- The “formal conception of norms”: the EU norms are transposed into national legislation, the institutions and the procedures are in line with EU rules;
- The “behavioral conception”: here adoption is measured by to what extent the behavior is conformed to the EU rules;
- The “discursive conception”: here the adoption consists in the incorporation of EU rules as a positive reference into domestic actors’ discourse. Such a reference may indicate that the actor is really convinced by the rules. Yet, it may also indicate that politicians just talk or use the rule strategically in a “rhetorical action”.

These different forms of rule adoption can lead to institutionalization. However they don’t exclude each-other (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005: 8). We will address these issues on the case of Albania in the following developments.

Hence institutionalist theories allow us to better understand the reality of Europeanization. We meet two main approaches here: the rationalist and the sociological institutionalism. We rely on the

approaches resumed by Mirela Bogdani and John Loughlin when writing about the Albanian integration:

“Rationalist institutionalism emphasizes the absence of multiple veto points and the presence of supporting institutions, as the main factors facilitating change. Sociological institutionalism points to the socialization of domestic actors, who become ‘norm entrepreneurs’ and ‘change agents’. A cooperative political culture will also facilitate adaptation”. (Bogdani and Loughlin 2007: 19, *rappel des théories de Börzel et Risse*)

Another important distinction is given by Marche and Olsen between the ‘logic of appropriateness’ (LoA) and the ‘logic of consequences’ (LoC):

“The LoA refers to the assimilation of norms by domestic actors, because it is the right thing to do (and therefore appropriate). The LoC refers to the assimilation of norms by these actors, because they are aware that failure to do so will have adverse consequences for them, that is, there is no true assimilation” (Bogdani and Loughlin 2007: 19).

Finally, by combining both previous approaches, Bogdani and Loughlin describe the Europeanization in Albania as follows:

“The central argument of this book is that in the Albanian case, there exist multiple veto points to the adaptation of European norms, domestic actors are driven by a logic of consequences rather than a logic of appropriateness, mainly found in the corrupt political class and their criminal connections, and that there is a political culture of conflict and division, rather than of cooperation.” (Bogdani and Loughlin 2007: 20).

All these aspects lead us to the theoretical question of the effectiveness of conditionality in Albania and especially regarding the democratization process. We will go on arguing on these approaches in the section devoted to the integration perception of the Albanian elite.

b. The effectiveness of conditionality and its consequences in Albania

First, there seems to be some contradictions in the last EU progress report on Albania. First, on the one hand, the EU considers the country's progress on implementing the Copenhagen criteria. On the other hand, it talks about the Albanian significant gaps in this area. The current extremely polarized political situation and deadlock on democracy and rule of law key reforms seem to rather prove this second hypothesis. For the Commission, Albania has adopted the necessary constitutional and legislative reforms regarding the institutions functioning, the reinforcement of the rule of law and human rights. Yet, we think that this assertion is more a form of “formal conception”: the EU norms and procedures are transposed into the Albanian legislation or are in line with the EU rules. What about the behavioral and discursive adoption of the EU rules? More directly we address the following question: are these reforms essential to a sustainable democracy implemented or is there only a fictive adoption on the paper? If the answer to the question is negative, how could one pretend that Albania has made progress in this direction?

The European Commission itself notes that the European standards implementation in Albania is not entirely satisfactory¹³. A little further in its progress report, the Commission raises the consequences due to the deadlock of the political dialogue and its shortcomings. It also talks about efficiency problems of democratic institutions and the lack of reforms on the rule of law issues and the judiciary independence. One could add to this list the deadlock of the implementation of essential

¹³ Commission staff working document analytical report, Communication from the commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Commission opinion on Albania's application for membership of the European Union, Brussels, 09 november 2010, p. 6.

electoral, administrative and judicial reform. Albania is experiencing the deepest political crisis since 1997 policy which is due to all these elements that make the democratization of the country very difficult.

Here are some of our findings on these issues.

First, let us illustrate our point on the EU rules adoption issues. The OSCE's latest report seems firmer than the EU's one, in that it focuses more on the troubling problems due to the deadlock of electoral, judicial and institutional reforms. The Head of Rule of Law and Human Rights Department of the OSCE Presence in Albania, (who thinks furthermore that even OSCE is not sufficiently demanding on the Albanian respect of democratic standards), deepens the question of the implementation of the *acquis communautaire*. If the latter is not implemented the EU rules remain an empty shell.

For him the national laws transposing EU legislation are themselves partly responsible for the non-implementation of EU rules. In fact, some laws have good objectives but they are poorly written and especially the implementation part is not particularly understood. Sometimes the necessary measures to the EU rules implementation are not provided or too much room is left for their interpretation as to their implementation. This also makes the EU rules application difficult. According to the interviewee, sometimes the implementation is even entrusted to institutions without the necessary staff or with unskilled staff for an effective implementation. Moreover, he raises the issue of bad translation of EU rules by non specialists, which also poses problems in terms of implementation.

Again for this OSCE official, EU is not sufficiently demanding Albania to comply with democratic standards. He then concludes that the objectives of the EU concerning the Albanian integration are more about security and stability targets in the region rather than checking that each state builds a political system in accordance with European rules. But even those targets cannot be achieved without the implementation of a consolidated democracy and the reinforcement of the rule of law. The civil war of 1997 is important as evidence here.

Then, let us examine the issue of the essential electoral reform. The very foundation of any democratic system is the organization of free and fair elections. The European Commission refers to "certain shortcomings" in regard to 2009 legislative elections after having argued about their compliance with the international standards (Commission report, November 2010). The electoral reform was demanded by the OSCE and the EU. However, because of the political deadlock, this reform has not occurred yet and the municipal elections of June 2011 took place in the absence of this essential requirement. European Council considers that "the EU has closely followed the 2011 municipal elections and notes that they were generally conducted in a transparent and competitive manner, albeit with procedural difficulties"¹⁴. He calls on political forces to carry out the electoral reform forward in cooperation with the OSCE before the next elections. Hence the Commission and the Council talk about "certain shortcomings" and "procedural difficulties". Yet these allegations do not seem to truly reflect the substance of the seriousness of the nowadays political situation in Albania. In fact one of the most important Albanian electoral experts and member of the Helsinki Committee whom we interviewed in Albania analyzed these issues with gravity. He also stated that the EU is not sufficiently demanding in regard to democratic standards.

Moreover, it results that the EU does not seem to use enough the coercion leverage in the context of conditionality to maintain and accelerate the pace of reforms. Although the willingness of the EU to encourage Albania and to note its efforts positively -- that exist for sure --, shouldn't it remain

¹⁴ Council conclusions on Albania, 3101st Foreign Affairs Council meeting Luxembourg, 20 June 2011, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/foraff/122937.pdf >

vigilant and demanding in terms of democratic standards? The EU qualifies itself these standards as fundamental to the accession. Some authors go even further, considering that the EU would even have the moral obligation to use its leverage in order to foster the development of democracy (Rollo et al. 1990).

Let us quote Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier regarding this point:

“EU conditionality mainly follows a strategy of reactive reinforcement or reinforcement by reward. [...] Under this strategy, the EU pays the reward if the target government complies with the conditions and withholds the reward if it fails to comply”(2007:11).

Thus, given these major obstacles in the path of democratization and Europeanization, we would expect that the EU does not relax the pressure on Albania. However, its decision about visas liberalization might seem inappropriate and could even lead to question the credibility of conditionality. This liberalization has even been too much used by the government in place as a real victory. Indeed according to some interviewees, Albanian political actors talk more about the visa liberalization's victory and very little on the refusal of candidate status. A similar reasoning is proposed by Judith Hoffman when she writes on the integration of Albania and the EU's role in the democratization process. She states that the negotiation of an SAA might not be the best way to maintain the reforms rhythm. She insists a lot on the credibility of the conditionality (Hoffman 2005).

The discussion on the use of conditionality remains open, and for some authors like Jacques Rupnik (2011) conditionality is not considered in the same way. He even goes further by recommending to give the candidate status to all countries of the region as well as a date for opening the accession negotiations. For the author, the EU does not have a regional integration project and it proceeds country by country by creating a competition between them. He states as follows:

“There are two ways of assessing the situation in the region. One is to adopt the perspective of the EU Commission in its progress reports and to establish, in true regatta spirit a ranking of the Western Balkans countries in their onwards march towards EU membership. The other is to combine a broader regional picture with the view from the Balkans states themselves (the main aim of this volume), which shows the limits of individual, country by country approaches to the shared problems and remaining contentious issues and to EU integration.” (Rupnik 2011: 20:21).

And the author concludes:

“[...] The Balkans requires a rethink of the EU approach to enlargement, which cannot simply replicate the pattern so successfully applied in Central Europe. The EU should strengthen the regional approach by giving all the countries of the region candidate status and a date for the opening of negotiations. The pace and completion of the process will then depend on the capacity to deliver of each country's political elite, thus making their respective responsibilities clear and the political costs of failure more palatable. But that, in turn, requires the EU to overcome its hesitation between containment and integration and to renew its commitment to the Balkans' European future in order to restore its credibility in the region and at international level.” (Rupnik 2011: 30).

Finally, while the EU has an important responsibility, national political actors have an essential role to play. Rupnik also calls for the accountability of the elite. For the most Euro-enthusiastic interviewees, they think that the EU is the only one who knows what is good for Albania. In contrast to the latter ones, the most pessimistic elites we interviewed think that Albania is not ready to join the EU. It is a form of disempowerment of the elite to which the EU should pay more attention, beyond the exercise of implementing standards in the country. Therefore, we want to devote a more detailed analysis to the perception that the Albanian elite has on the EU integration.

2. THE ALBANIAN'S ELITE INTEGRATION PERCEPTION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

a. The Albanian's elite integration perception

According to Ivan Krastev, « in democratic politics, perceptions are in a sense all that matters » (Krastev 2002: 40).

We would like to begin this part by Krastev' position since the literature on Europeanization has focused primarily on the European institutional impact in the Western Balkans and only few studies have focused on the EU perception in the Balkans and the consequences of Europeanization (Subotic 2011). Yet, these aspects are essential in order to better understand the process of European integration in this region and particularly because of the important influence of the national level on the Europeanization itself (recalled in Saurugger 2009: 258-259).

The purpose of our inquiry in Albania was to interview several representatives of the Albanian elite and international observers on the perception of integration. We want to present here some interesting results for our analysis.

To the question of why Albania wants to join the EU and if it has an individual integration strategy, most of our interlocutors seem to be at some extent surprised. In fact for them the EU integration appears to be both necessary and obvious. They often motivate their answer by the natural place of Albania in Europe, by the fact that for a long time the country was isolated because of communism and then "unfortunately" (the word is often used) it was cut from its European destination. For some individuals we interviewed, the Albanians also see the EU as a Schengen area, a space for free movement of people. We feel that few persons are really aware and empowered by what integration really means. This finding is also reflected further in our analysis. This raises the question of the understanding of EU integration, an essential element for a viable integration.

For many of our interviewees it is the EU who knows what is best for Albania, who defines the rules and thus the Albanians have to do their best to meet them. For the most pessimistic of them, Albania is not ready to enter the EU and they do not see what Albania could bring to the EU. Finally it does not result a common integration project between the elites who also remain divided on several issues related to Europe. However, the decision to join the EU is unanimous among all parties. The problem is that: "the statement of priority (*that*) often seems to be more rhetorical than realistic and little more than a mantra in the political struggle" (Bogdani and Loughlin 2007: 146). "

These results might also reflect a lack of confidence in the ability of elites to join the EU and a sort of inferiority complex at some extent. Bogdani and Loughlin, when comparing the CEECs' elites and those of the Western Balkans, say that they have "much-less self confidence" in their way to integration and "are also skeptical about the extent to which the EU wishes to accept them" (93).

Also, the fact that for many of our personalities, Albania is very close to the EU in adopting its regulations is somehow worrying. Yet "accession is not merely a legal process that involves the approximatization of legislation, but a process changing the legal framework in which society and the economy operate" (Bogdani and Loughlin 2007: 104).

It is important to note that according to the latest Gallup Balkan Monitor's report, Albania is the most Euro-enthusiastic country in the Balkan region and that EU and NATO remain the most trusted institutions in the country¹⁵. Would one conclude about this *quasi* Europhoria, that it is a sort of

¹⁵ Annual Report of Gallup et de l'European Fund for the Balkans, 2010 : http://balkans.courriers.info/IMG/pdf/BalkanMonitor-2010_Summary_of_Findings.pdf

indicator that the Albanian elite does not have enough perspective on the Europeanization process and on its own responsibilities in this area?

If we refer to social constructivism, here Albania doesn't respond to a logic of appropriateness because we have the feeling that Albanians adopt the European rules more by obligation than in a logic of assimilation of European values. This argument is emphasized by the fact that there is a deep division between the political parties which doesn't allow the elites to cooperate within a common integration project which would facilitate the appropriateness.

Furthermore the problems of corruption of the Albanian political class remain (Bogdani and Loughlin 2007: 20) a big obstacle to the Europeanization process which is used by them as we have mentioned above in a discursive rhetoric way.

We would like now to address the question of the consequences of the integration perception by the Albanian elite on the very processes of Europeanization and democratization.

b. The integration perception consequences on the Europeanization and democratization process

According to the Europeanization definition given by Claudio Radaelli (2001) that we recalled in our introduction, the Europeanization process includes different actors, instruments and levels. It is "circular" and not linear as it includes "the construction of the European integration (*uploading*) as well as the influence of the integration process over the national level (*downloading*), and the latter influence once again the European integration (*uploading*)" (Saurugger 2009 : 258-259).

We focus particularly on this latter point: what is the influence of the national level on the Europeanization in Albania? In other words, how the integration's perception does influence the Europeanization and the democratization process?

One might think that the lack of joint integration project, the absence of the behavioral dimension in adopting the European rules, the rhetoric integration use and its simple formal adoption, are serious obstacles to an effective Europeanization. This has direct implications for democratization in that Europeanization particularly consists in the adoption of EU rules guaranteeing and protecting democracy. The integration would be like an empty gutted shell without effective implementation of the rules and without the compliant behavior to the European values. The danger would be that Europeanization is used opportunistically to obtain the benefits of integration. In that context, democratization would be used opportunistically as well (Welzel 2009).

It is also important for the EU to assess the Albanian's elite perception of the integration process. Without this information, EU could take the risk to build an Europeanization limited in its effectiveness. We would like to recall the argument of Ivan Krastev on the importance of perceptions:

"In democratic politics, perceptions are in a sense all that matters. People's perceptions determine how they vote, how much money they save, whether they want to immigrate or not, and whether they feel more inclined to cooperation than conflict." (Krastev 2002: 40).

As a result, it is essential to know the elites' perceptions and even the Albanian population's perceptions in that they are the main actors responsible for the success or the failure of the integration project. The perception of the integration by the Western Balkans remains a very important subject but still under-theorized. Here, it would be particularly interesting to analyze the impact of collective identity on the process of Europeanization, including the cultural aspects of this process. This could help to understand the general integration's impact in the Western Balkans and

in Albania in particular. We work on the impact of this identity with regards to the research of Jelena Subotic on Croatia and Serbia (Jelena Subotic 2011).

Finally an important role should be played by the EU for the accountability of elites (Rupnik 2011). Indeed, this accountability would imply for the Albanian political actors: to think about what European integration means for the country, its impact on the democratization, to build a critical position on the positive and negative aspects of this process and especially to have a clear vision of what they undertake. This accountability would increase the chances of a viable and effective integration opening thus the way for a sustainable democracy.

Conclusion

We have seen that Europeanization does not necessarily mean democratization and that the Europeanization process of Albania is a relevant example regarding this statement. The Albanian's path to join its neighbors in their way to EU integration is long and the choices belong to Albanians. Albania possesses significant strengths on which it should rely on more in order to move forward. It is a young, dynamic country, where there is religious harmony which could even serve as an example for other countries. Its geostrategic position and its important role in the regional cooperation also confirmed by the EU should enable Albania to move forward on its path towards integration.

The conditionality policy pursued by the EU has greatly influenced and continues to influence the country's democratization which began after the fall of communism. We could for instance mention the creation of the Commission against discrimination and the law against discrimination in 2010 required by the EU as part of the visa liberalization process. It is also necessary that this institution is effective and that the law is implemented. The same requirement of effectiveness is made for all EU rules on the consolidation of democracy and the reinforcement of the rule of law. It is especially the responsibility of the internal forces, to lead the way to the success of the integration project and the implementation of an effective democratization. Thus, they have to make progress in order to cut with the following observation which is unfortunately, still relevant:

« Albania has made good progress in installing procedural democracy. Political democratization at the level of substantive democracy, on the other hand, is progressing very slowly. The responsibility for this lies mainly with an unstable and immature political climate, which has continued to be characterized by political conflicts and crises”. (Bogdani and Loughlin 2007)

For its part, the EU should maintain its pressure and require the same democratic standards to Albania as it does for its member states. The effectiveness of Europeanization and of European security depends on it. As we observed, the EU does not seem to use the leverage of conditionality with as much pressure as it could do. In that case, the democratization process is also affected.

Finally, empirical studies with the Albanian elites should be continued and deepened. The only analysis of the EU institutional impact in the country does not allow one to totally understand the integration process. In that perspective, we believe that studies on the construction of the collective identity would be of great contribution to better understand the complexity of the Europeanization process in Albania. Such approaches could also lead to other kinds of comparative analysis in the Balkans region on Europeanization and democratization issues.

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