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## Albania and European Union: Rethinking EU Integration

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**ALBANIA AND EUROPEAN UNION**  
**RETHINKING EU INTEGRATION**

**Tirana 2008**



EMBAJADA DE ESPAÑA  
EN ALBANIA



AGENCIA ESPAÑOLA  
DE COOPERACIÓN  
INTERNACIONAL  
OFICINA TÉCNICA  
DE COOPERACIÓN  
CON LOS BALCANES



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## I. INTRODUCTION

In June 2008, the Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS) carried out its sixth survey on Albania's integration to the European Union. The level of support and information of the society at large regarding European integration is relevant as ever, both due to the fact that Albanian citizens will be both propagators and beneficiaries of accession, as well as due to the multitude of domestic, regional and EU developments at a time when Albania has entered a new qualitative stage in terms of development and institutional relationships with the European Union.

In 2006 Albania signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) the ratification of which is underway and is expected to be completed at the beginning of 2009. The Interim Agreement, which entered into force in December 2006, has also for two years now allowed Albania to benefit from the SAA's trade-related conditions and faced public finances and private enterprises with an increasingly open economy. In addition, an EU-Albania agreement on visa facilitation seeking to facilitate contact with the academia, civil society, and business communities in EU Member States was signed in September 2007 and has entered into force on 1 January 2008. Other significant related developments were also the receipt of NATO invitation at the Bucharest Summit and the ongoing ratification of the Membership Protocol, as well as the declaration of the independence of Kosovo and the changes in induced in regards to the regions' EU integration perspective.

Despite the varying level of implementation and short-term tangible effects, these developments have constituted great achievements for a country transitioning out of one of the harshest and most isolated communist regimes in Europe.

At the current stage of political, economic, and social development and of the intensification of institutional relationships with the EU, "Albania in Europe" is however more than an aspiration uniting the politicians, the elite, and society at large. Each step ahead in the integration path calls for increasingly sophisticated knowledge, reforms, local ownership as well as costs and benefits, all of which make the understanding of the support and knowledge of EU integration critical to the Albanian institutions and other organized groups, as well as to the European Union and the various actors in the Member States. The periodical monitoring of public opinion may thus help identify problems in the process of integration and associated reforms, but at the same time also serve as an anchor for both domestic reforms as well as integration advocacy in the EU and Member States.

With these goals in mind, the study offers a picture of the citizen's attitudes to Albania's accession to the EU, the public opinion about the potential effects of accession, as well as the level and sources of information on Albania's integration process. The study was conducted using face-to-face surveys on a representative sample of 1,000 respondents (aged 18+) in Albania's main urban centers. As last year, the survey gauged the support, perceptions and knowledge of society at large through the same method and instrument, thus also offering the first opportunity to compare trends at the level of society<sup>1</sup>.

We consider the data gathered and the analysis offered of utmost importance to our understanding of the situation and hope that they also prove useful to the Albanian government and society, as well to the EU and Member State actors and their attitudes and policies towards Albania's EU integration bid.

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<sup>1</sup> The first four surveys gauged the perceptions of elites groups only. See more at [www.aiis-albania.org](http://www.aiis-albania.org)

## II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Overwhelming support for EU Membership**

Albania stands as a unique case of strong and wide *public* support for the country's integration in the EU. The percentage of citizens who are in favor of Albania's accession to the EU has increased from 93.8 percent in 2007 to 95 percent this year, while the number of citizens opposing Albania's accession into the Union has decreased from 2.4 percent in 2007 to only 1.84 percent in 2008.

This persistent popular support of the Albanian society towards accession into the European Union is unmatched by any other neighboring countries aspiring EU integration. The trend also does not match the trend that countries of Eastern and Central Europe, now EU members, depicted in the last ten years. The consistent trend in these countries was that the closer they got to accession, the more the support for membership faded. The explanation of this Albanian "anomaly", is however important beyond academic curiosity and scientific research. A rational and comprehensive explanation would be critical both to enhancing the level of local ownership of the EU integration process on one hand, as well as to the EU itself and the European institutions that assist the preparation of Albania for membership, on the other. Based on this study, as well as the consecutive surveys of the last 6 years, there are a number of potential explanations that can be offered for the popular support that EU accession cherishes in Albania.

The first explanation comes from the political perspective. The unique popular support that the Albanian society demonstrates for the accession of the country in the EU is first explained by the fact that all of the consecutive Albanian

governments after the fall of communism, while deeply divided on a number of issues of significant importance, have maintained a strongly united position when it comes to the European future of the country. In addition, there has been no political party or any other economic, academic, religious or media organization, institution or syndicate to date to have expressed any opposition or hesitation towards Albania's aspirations for EU membership.

The second consideration is a social one. The unwavering popular support for EU membership should also be explained as a claim seeking to demonstrate and acknowledge the belonging of the Albanian society to European values and the European identity.

Furthermore, the overwhelming support for EU membership is also partially explained by the expectations that Albanian citizens have of EU membership and the level of knowledge and understanding of EU integration process. As far as expectations are concerned, free movement seems to continue to remain the most important factor that could mobilize citizens to vote in favor of accession in a potential referendum. The view that free movement is the main reason for integration and the first expectation of membership is shared by 52 percent of citizens.

Last but not least, it seems like the state of the Albanian economy can contribute to explaining the Albanian high EU-membership-support secret. Although from the legal point of view the Albanian economy is open, in practical terms it continues to remain largely "closed", mainly due with the structure of the economy and the domination of the non-production sectors. Therefore, important sectors of the domestic economy, such as agriculture and light industry are not affected by the European market. Although the Interim Agreement has been implemented for two years now, it seems that it is public finances rather than private enterprises and trade that are affected. From this point of view, the national economy has still not started to lose from the process of integration. As a result, although surveys note that the Albanian business community has started to show the first signs of resistance to EU membership<sup>2</sup>,

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<sup>2</sup> See Albania EU perceptions and Realities 2005 & 2006 [www.aiis-albania.org](http://www.aiis-albania.org)

it can be still confidently stated that support for EU integration is popular even in this group.

### **European Union - a strategic partner**

Along with the popular support for EU membership, the Albanian society continues to perceive the European Union as a strategic partner. Thus, 94.6 percent of the respondents think the government should see the relationship with the EU as a priority<sup>3</sup>, a perception that the findings of the 2005, 2006 and 2007 surveys show to also be very consistent<sup>4</sup>.

The evaluation of the European Union as one of the most strategic partners for Albania should be explained as a result of the enhancement of the role, presence, and visibility of the European Union in the country as well as a reflection of the desire and determination of Albanian citizens to join 'Europe'. The results of this year's survey also confirm the trend identified in the past five-six years of a correlation between support for membership and the percentage of citizens that consider the EU a strategic partner of the government.

The survey shows that Albanians maintain more or less the same perception of the strategic importance that a number of countries and other institutions should have for Albania. The strategic evaluation of NATO has been high throughout the last six years and has grown stronger this year, which is to be expected, given the NATO invitation of the Bucharest Summit in April. The United States of America maintain the same strong perception of strategic importance while the survey shows that the list of other strategically important states includes Italy, Germany, Spain and Great Britain.

With the exception of Kosova, which 77, 57 % of citizens think should be considered a priority, the level of importance that the government should attach

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<sup>3</sup> 88,41 percent and 6,19 percent think that the government should respectively pay attention and pay a lot of attention, to the relationship with the EU.

<sup>4</sup> See Albania EU perceptions and Realities [www.aiis-albania.org](http://www.aiis-albania.org)

to Macedonia, Monte Negro and Croatia are relatively low. The level is even lower when it comes to Serbia, with only 14 % of citizens seeing the relationships between the two countries as strategically important.

### **Albania not ready for EU membership**

The majority of Albanian citizens believe that despite the progress achieved, Albania is still not ready for accession into the European Union. Only 31.76 percent of the respondents believe that Albania is ready for accession in the EU, compared to 52.03 percent believing the opposite. Albanians however believe that the country has in these last years made better progress than some of the other Balkan countries that also aspire EU membership. The majority of respondents believe that in 2008, Albania has made better progress than Serbia, FYROM and Bosnia & Herzegovina. However, Albanian citizens have a very positive perception of the progress achieved by Monte Negro, and especially Croatia.

These perceptions seem to confirm a better understanding of the integration process as a process of domestic reforms and not as an agreement between the government and Brussels. Compared to last year, fewer Albanian citizens believe that the European Union should accept Albania before the country is ready. Nevertheless, the fact that 33,92 percent of citizens still believe that the European Union should accept Albania before it is ready testifies to the lack of a complete and clear understanding of the integration process.

### **Free movement: A problem & a misunderstanding**

Free movement in EU Member States is the first and most important benefit that Albanian citizens expect of the potential accession of Albania in the EU. Indeed, the first reason why more than 50 percent of the Albanian citizens would vote in favor of EU membership in the case of a referendum is the opportunity for free movement in European countries. This identification of the integration

process primarily with free movement is also very consistent in the perceptions of the Albanian society. The surveys and studies of the past six years, whether those on selected categories such as Business Community, Public Administration, Civil Society, Media and Local Governance, as well as studies on the general population, point free movement to be the first benefit that citizens expect from European integration. This remains true despite the fact that in the last two to three years, citizens also identify other important benefits such as improvements in the living standard (voted by 42, 8 percent) and the strengthening of democracy and rule of law (voted by 38, 11 percent).

The perception of free movement as the main benefit of the country's accession into the EU also explains, to a certain extent, the uniquely and consistently high level of support that the Albanian society has demonstrated for EU integration since the fall of the communist regime. There is no doubt that the identification of EU membership primarily with free movement is a clear misunderstanding that needs to be addressed. However, at the same time, this perception is also an affirmation of the dismaying reality in Albania and the Western Balkans as far as the visa regimes are concerned. Despite the process of visa facilitation and the respective agreements that Albania has signed with the European Union, the situation has changed either little, or not at all. The iron curtain that once separated the West from the East seems to have been replaced by the Schengen Wall.

### **Higher optimism regarding time of accession**

Despite believing that the country is not ready, the majority of Albanian citizens believe that accession in the EU will happen within the year 2015, and a 24,9 percent even believe that membership will come within the year 2010. This apparent spectacular level of optimism is however understandably unrealistic if we keep in mind the real preparation of the country for accession as well as the internal developments in the European Union, which in addition to the so-called enlargement fatigue now also include the problems that accompanied the recent accession of Bulgaria and Romania.

One of the main factors that may have encouraged such optimism could be the invitation to join NATO that Albania received at the April Summit this year, as the accession of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and later Bulgaria and Romania, into the EU, was preceded by NATO membership. Another important factor which may explain the high level of optimism is the view that despite the fact that the country is not ready for accession, the EU should offer membership in order to speed up domestic reforms. This idea has been dominant and consistent in the Albanian society and it is highly likely that the invitation for NATO Membership has reinforced this idea.

The nonrealistic optimism that Albanians currently have about EU membership could also be the strong popular desire that Albanians have to see their country integrated in the EU. It is indeed quite significant that only 1.22 percent of the respondents believe that Albania will never be a member of the European Union. The political use of integration by the Albanian political establishments and the promises to move the accession date closer also encourage such expectations. Causes nonetheless, such nonrealistic optimism needs to be appropriately addressed as it could set the stage for disappointments and potentially harm the support for accession in the coming years.

### **Remaining misunderstandings and lack of information**

The study also reveals that despite the raised level of maturity and understanding of the EU integration process, misconceptions and a relative lack of knowledge persist in the society. Although the respondents generally correctly identify many of the challenges that lie ahead, it must be noted that they repeatedly fail to give economic factors due importance.

The misunderstandings and misperceptions encountered become clearer when one considers the sources of information for society at large, the first of which are TV channels, followed by the press and the internet. The information provided by these wide-reaching but not-necessarily credible sources of information is not adequately balanced by institutional and academic sources

of information, be that of the government, civil society organizations, or the EU Delegation in Albania.

Many of the misunderstanding and misconceptions were shared by all groups of respondents, regardless of educational background. However, the study confirmed that better educated respondents are generally better informed and likely have access to more credible and complex information on the EU. Although the differences are often not large, this should be taken in account in the selection of channels of information and the shaping of awareness campaigns so that the audience and their level of access and understanding are appropriately targeted.

### III. RECOMMENDATIONS

This year's study reconfirms the extraordinary and unique support that Albanian citizens show towards Albania's membership in the European Union. This level of popular support and the rising level of optimism therefore calls for a serious and critical reconsideration of strategies and actions followed so far by state or non-state actors.

With progress achieved in the ratification of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union and an invitation to join NATO in the coming few months, Albania now has a real opportunity to move out of its relatively long political, economic and social transition. However, a number of challenges remain in regards to the enhancement the *local ownership* of the European integration process and the addressing of weaknesses that led to a number of problematic developments in 2008, likely to materialize in the coming year.

*First*, from the political point of view, the Albanian democracy continues to remain largely formal and non-substantial. *Secondly*, as far as the functioning and efficiency of the state is concerned, the year 2008 proved that the reforms implemented to prepare Albania for EU membership have still not been well-understood and have not yet matched the level of institutional efficiency of the European model. *Last but not least*, a number of issues from the economic development point of view, such as the large informal economy, the generally low level of foreign direct investment, the relatively unchanged poverty levels, the regional disparities and the preservation of the status-quo of the property issue are negatively affecting the public's trust in the country's governance and the materialization of European integration as a process of economic, political and social progress.

Keeping in mind the importance of local ownership of the European integration process, these recommendations can be offered in response to the above-mentioned three aspects:

- *The implementation of all critical reforms required for the conduction of free and fair elections.* A controversial and contested electoral process would significantly harm the country's European perspective, which cherishes utmost public support. The support shown towards the European integration process indeed reflects the strong preference that the Albanian society has for the European model of democracy and its functioning.
- *The implementation of structural reforms that lead to the strengthening of rule of law and especially of the judiciary system and other law enforcement agencies.* The fight against war and corruption, which Albanian citizens consider to be obstacles to the speeding of the process of EU integration, is crucial to the strengthening of the state and is not just a requirement of the European Union. This context calls for the implementation of indispensable structural reforms seeking to strengthen state institutions as well as for a change in the approach taken so far, where efforts have generally focused on petty corruption only.
- The government should utilize the extraordinary support that the Albanian society shows towards EU accession to rationalize and explain economic reforms, which, as the experience of new EU members has shown, are painful. The experience of these countries, now EU member states, has shown the low support for EU membership to have been a reflection of the resistance that these societies have demonstrated towards the economic reforms.

The fact that the European Union is publicly perceived as a strategic partner towards which the Albanian government should dedicate priority attention, clearly shows that the role, contribution and authority of the European Union

and its institutions in Albania has grown considerably. In this context:

- The European Union and its institutions should continue to use their prestige and authority for timely and concrete inferences that seek to correct potential deformations of the democratic processes in Albania. The development and strengthening of democracy is surely a task of the local authorities and of the Albanian society, however, it seems that the weak Albanian democracy is still in need of the contribution of the international community, a prestigious and authoritative part of which the institutions of the European Union are.

The study clearly shows that despite the improvements that have been made, Albanians face serious problems when it comes to the opportunities for free movement in the European Union Member States. In this context, it is important that:

- The Albanian government carefully follows and calls for the implementation of the visa facilitation agreement, which, despite Brussels' good will, the national governments of Member States seem to not be ready to implement in practice.
- The Albanian government should further engage in the improvement and enhancement of the opportunities of free movement of citizens in EU countries not only through the production of identification documents that match European standards and the effective management of borders, but also by being more demanding towards the European Union. It seems that in addition to the agreements with the European Union, it is critical that the government also pays attention to bilateral agreements with the EU Member States.
- It is also critical that the government, the European Union and the Member States clearly explain the visa facilitation agreement in order to avoid and address the confusion surrounding the meaning and practical effects of this agreement.

- The government and the political parties should stop promising visa facilitation and the liberalization of visa regimes with EU member countries in exchange of short-term political benefits.

Although this year's survey reflects a more clear understanding of the European integration process, a number of misunderstandings persist. They even have to do with important issues such as the factors that would speed up the integration process, the time when Albania will become an EU member and the identification of integration primarily with the opportunity for free travel, which despite the problematique that it carries, is a fundamental misunderstanding. In this context, we recommend:

- The enhancement of the local ownership of the European integration process through the inclusion of not only the Ministry of Integration, but of all state institutions and government bodies at the local level. It is also critical that cooperation is established with local authorities, universities, schools, organizations of civil society and the media in organizing creative awareness campaigns that explain the European integration process.
- The Ministry of Education should also take steps to establish a department of EU studies or at the very least MA courses on the subject. Such an investment would not only raise the level of information but also contribute to building a pool of sound and trained professionals, which will be critical to both the pre-accession and the post-accession periods.
- The government should also finance and carry out more studies, surveys and analysis on the European integration process and disseminate such information according to the audience's level of knowledge and understanding.
- Likewise, the government should assist NGOs and think-tanks in reaching the public. Despite being one of the groups better capable to

provide accurate and user-friendly information, their dependency on foreign donations puts considerable constraints in reaching the public and enhancing local ownership.

- The EU Delegation in Albania should continue its investment in raising its profile in the country's public life, give more clear messages despite the political constraints in the EU and Albania, and be more active in providing information on the integration process.

## IV. FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

The first part of this section focuses on the main trends of public opinion and attitude about Albania's integration process into the European Union while the second part focuses on the citizens' expectations of membership. The third and fourth sections respectively explore at more depth the understanding of the determining factors of integration and the citizen's level and sources of information in this regard.

### 4.1. Support for EU membership

The support for European Union membership remains remarkably strong in Albania. For the sixth consecutive year the Albanian citizens are unsurprising with their unremitting enthusiastic support for Albania's integration into the European Union. A slight increase in enthusiasm can even be claimed, as this year 1.2 percent more respondents are in favor of Albania's integration into EU compared to last year. Thus, if a nation-wide referendum was going to be held on the question of the country's membership in the Union, 95 percent of the respondents would have voted in favor of membership compared to 93.8 percent in the previous year, thus gaining from the category of "do not know", which has decreased to 1.76 percent from 3.08 percent in 2007. However the number of respondents who would vote against membership has increased with 0.44 points or by 14.5%. A clear picture of the peoples' support towards the integration process and the level of remaining skepticism is depicted in Figure 1 below.

Question 9: If a Referendum were held tomorrow regarding Albania's membership in the European Union, how would you vote? Would you vote for accession or against it?

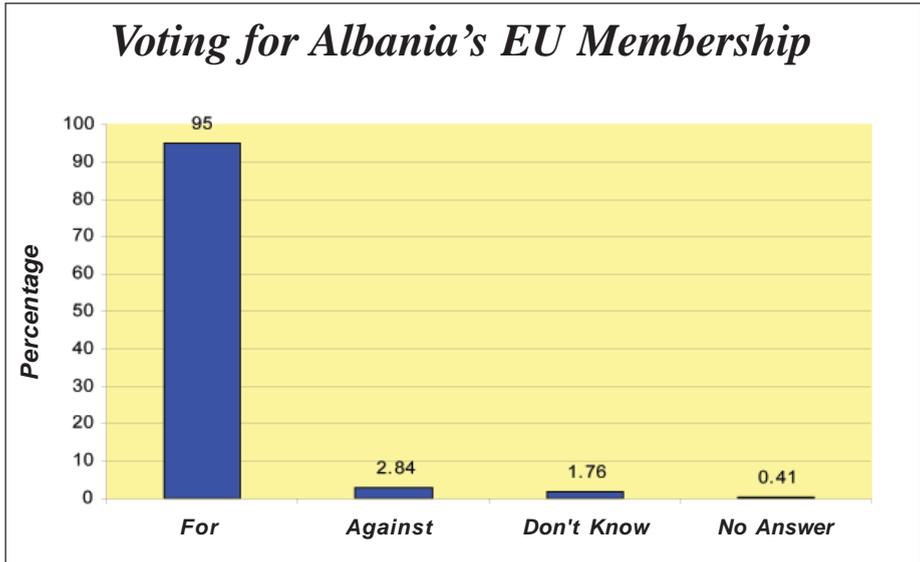


Figure 1. Voting for Albania's EU Membership

*Cross Tabular Table of Vote by Percent by Education Level*

Education Level	Voting for Albania's Membership in EU	Percent
Up to University	For	95.02
	Against	1.92
	Don't Know	3.07
	No Answer	0.01
	Total	100.00
University and Higher	For	95.59
	Against	3.36
	Don't Know	1.05
	No Answer	0.00
	Total	100.00

Table 1. Vote by Educational Level

There are no significant social differences on this dimension, particularly in terms of education, occupation and age of respondents. As shown in Table 1 above, 95% of respondents are in favor of Albania's membership in the EU despite their level of educational achievement.

The data shows that the difference in support towards Albania's EU membership by level of educational achievement is very small, 0.57 points. A slightly larger difference of 1.44 points is seen when it comes to opposition towards membership, where university graduates comprise the majority (3.36 percent vs. 1.92 percent non-university graduates). The percentage of university graduate voters opposing integration has increased from 2.7 percent in 2007 to 3.36 percent in 2008, while for the same category, the percentage of non university graduates has decreased with 0.18 points.

Although, these figures look insignificant compared to 95 % of the citizens that voted "YES", they indicate a slim tendency of rising skepticism among the elite towards accession, which calls for a consideration of potential reasons.

This persistent trend of popular support of the Albanian society towards accession into the European Union is unmatched by any other neighboring countries aspiring EU integration or by former non-EU members in Eastern and Central Europe, where support faded the closer the country got to accession. As Table 2 below shows, support for membership in these countries ranged from a low 67 % to the higher 90 % level of support.

How will you vote at a referendum on your country's accession to the EU? <sup>5</sup>				
	<b>Slovenia</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>Poland</b>	<b>Czech Republic</b>
For	90.00%	84.00%	77.00%	77.00%
Against	10.00%	16.00%	23.00%	23.00%
	<b>Slovakia</b>	<b>Lithuania</b>	<b>Latvia</b>	<b>Estonia</b>
For	92.00%	90.00%	67.00%	67.00%
Against	9.00%	9.00%	32.00%	33.00%

Table 2. Support in Central and Eastern European countries before accession

<sup>5</sup> www.galup-europe.be

Based on this study, as well as the consecutive surveys of the last 6 years, there are a number of potential explanations that can be offered for the popular support that EU accession cherishes in Albania, which are important both for local ownership, as well as the shaping of the EU attitudes and policies towards Albania.

The first explanation comes from the political perspective. The unique popular support that the Albanian society demonstrates for the accession of the country in the EU is first explained by the fact that there has been no political party or any other economic, academic, religious or media organization/institution/syndicate to date in Albania to have expressed any opposition or hesitation towards Albania's aspirations for EU membership.

From the social perspective, the unwavering popular support of Albanians for EU membership should also be explained as a claim of the Albanian society in demonstrating a belonging to European values and the European identity. The expectations that Albanian citizens have of the accession process and the level of knowledge and understanding of EU process are also important contributing factors.

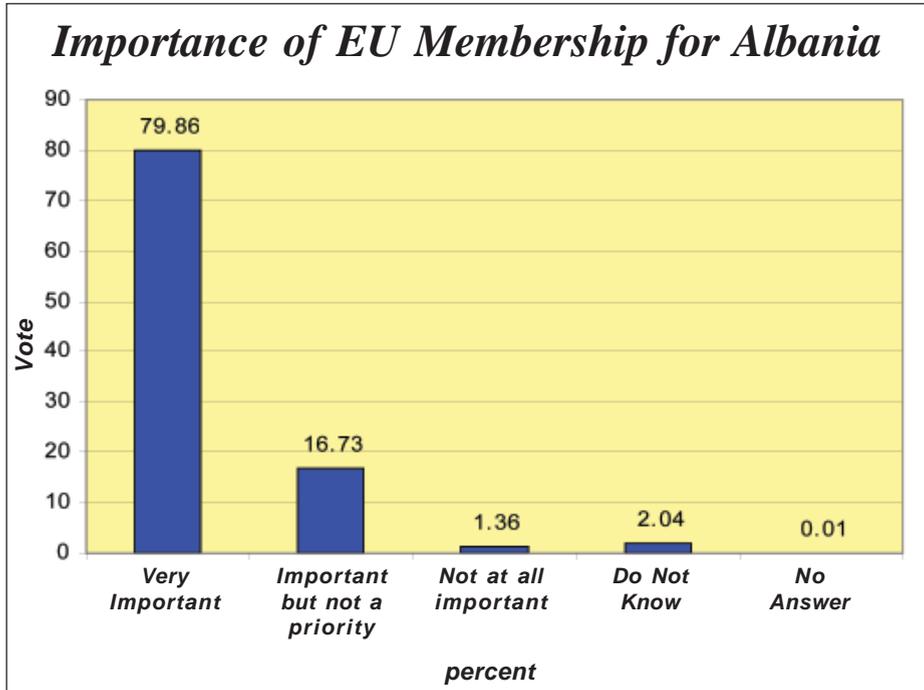
Last but not least, the state of the Albanian economy also explains a large part of the remarkable support. Due to its structure, the domestic economy remains relatively closed and important sectors of the economy, such as agriculture and light industry are not affected by the European market. The Interim Agreement, which has been now implemented for two years, seems to thus have affected public finances rather than private enterprises and trade. From this point of view, it seems that the national economy has still not started to lose from the process of integration. As a result, although surveys note<sup>6</sup> that the Albanian business community has started to show the first signs of resistance to EU membership, it can be still confidently stated that support for EU integration is popular even in this group.

<sup>6</sup> See Perceptions and Realities 2005, 2006 at [aiis-albania.org](http://aiis-albania.org)

## Importance of EU Membership

The survey findings also show that public opinion at large considers Albania's EU Membership to be very important.

*Should EU Membership for Albania be a priority?*



*Figure 2. Importance of EU Membership*

The Majority of the Albanians consider EU membership to be important (16.73%) and very important (79.86%). It is however interesting to note that the percentage of the population that considers EU membership to be very important and a priority, is quite lower than overall support for membership. Compared to last year, the percentage of respondents that deem EU accession a priority has decreased by 4 points, while an almost equal increase is noticed in the “important but not a priority” category. The percentage of respondents thinking that EU integration is “not at all important” has increased by an insignificant .26 points. Furthermore, like last year, the

percentage of citizens who would vote against EU accession is also higher than the percentage of citizens, who consider EU integration not at all important (respectively 2.84 % and 1.36 %). This suggests, more citizens are starting to believe that EU integration, despite being important, should not be the country's priority.

These two observations suggest that while opposition towards the consideration of EU integration as important has not changed, there is a relative cooling of enthusiasm towards EU integration, possibly a sign of frustration with the length and often, ambiguity, of the process.

### **Reasons for supporting accession**

The respondents were also asked about the main reasons for supporting EU accession. In the understanding of the Albanians, membership in the EU will improve the standards of living, free movement of peoples, consolidation of democracy and rule of law in the country and also enhance morals and responsibility in politics. Even though each of the options offered in the questionnaire is extremely important to the country's EU accession (standard of living, free movement of citizens, democracy and rule of law, morals and responsibility in politics), most citizens saw the largest benefit in movement in the EU (50.14%), followed by increases in the standard of living (42.84%) and the consolidation of democracy and rule of law (38.11%). The negative views and non-opinionated positions are distributed fairly equally.

Compared to last year, the scores went up by 10.54% for the standard of living, 8.74% for free movement, 13.8 % for better morals and responsible politics, and last but not least, by 27.71% for the consolidation of democracy and rule of law.

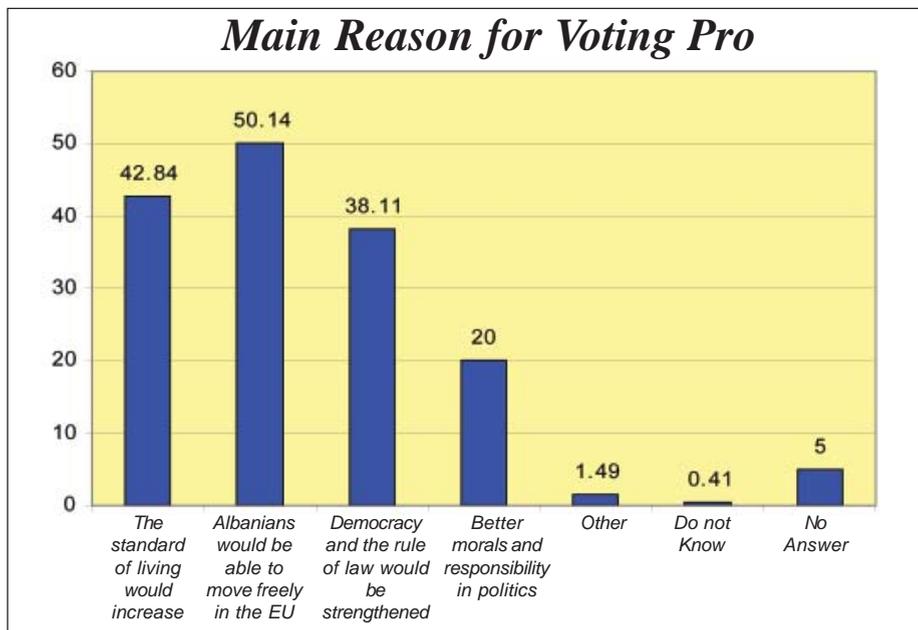


Figure 3. Main reason for voting in favor

*Main reason for Voting for Albania's Membership into the EU by education group*

Education	Main Reason FOR Voting	Percent
Up to University	The standard of living would increase	43.35
	Albanians would be able to move freely in the EU	52.47
	Democracy and the rule of law would be strengthened	27.76
	Better morals and responsibility in politics	14.07
	Other	0.38
	Do not Know	0.38
	Total	100.00
	University and Higher	The standard of living would increase
Albanians would be able to move freely in the EU		51.90
Democracy and the rule of law would be strengthened		46.98
Better morals and responsibility in politics		25.06
Other		0.45
Do not Know		0.45
Total		100.00

Table 3. Main reason for voting in favor, by education

Free movement in EU Member States is the first and most important benefit that Albanian citizens expect of the potential accession of Albania in the EU. The sole reason why more than 50 percent of the Albanian citizens, despite their level of education, would vote in favor of EU membership in the case of a referendum is the opportunity for free movement in European countries. The identification of the integration process primarily with free movement seems to also be very consistent, as affirmed by the surveys and studies of the past six years.

There is no doubt that the identification of EU membership mostly with free movement is a clear misunderstanding that needs to be addressed. However, at the same time, the perception of free movement as the main benefit of EU membership affirms a saddening reality in Albania and the Western Balkans. The EU visa regime is a considerable obstacle to the Europeanization process of the Western Balkan countries and a great limitation to travel, learning and business exchange. All EU member states have imposed a visa regime on Albania, a situation that is the same for the countries of the Western Balkans with the exception of Croatia. The two countries that joined the EU in 2007, Bulgaria and Romania, since 1st January 2007 also require visas of citizens of Western Balkan countries. That means that while the “hoop” around the Western Balkans is narrowing, the frustrations of isolation are growing among the citizens of Albania. Although the purpose of a visa regime is the prevention of organized crime, law abiding citizens face limitations on travel opportunities to pursue education, tourism and business in the EU. Despite the process of visa facilitation and the respective agreements that Albania has signed with the European Union, the situation has changed either little, or not at all. Indeed, the iron curtain that once separated the West from the East seems to have been replaced by the Shengen Wall.

The scores on the standard of living are not affected by the level of the respondent’s educational attainment. The level of education however divides citizens on their expectation about the consolidation of democracy and rule of law as well as for morals and responsibility in politics; respectively

they score a difference of 19.22 on the question of democracy and rule of law and 10.99 on issue of morals and responsibility in politics. Compared to the previous survey, both alternatives have increased significantly in importance for the elite of the country, suggesting an increased understanding of the EU integration process as a process of domestic reform and development on the part of the better-informed and better educated part of the population.

The expectations in this regard are rather different from those in neighboring countries, as similar surveys show that 78 percent of the Macedonians<sup>7</sup> and 67 percent of the Croatians expect that the economic issues will be main issues addressed by membership into the EU.<sup>8</sup>

### **Attention to be showed to EU and other European Countries**

The idealized efficiency of the “western” economies, democracy and rule of law, on one hand and the aspiration to leave the zone of economic inefficiency, inertia, corruption, conflict-ridden political climate and problematic law enforcement characterizing the country’s transition, on the other is also reflected in the expectations that the majority of Albanian citizens have in terms of the government’s relations with other countries and organizations.

The survey thus also sought to evaluate the importance that, in the view of citizens, the Albanian government should place on the strengthening of relationships with a number of countries and international organizations. The interviewees were asked to evaluate the perceived importance in a scale where 10-9 means “a lot of attention”, 8-7 means “attention”, 6-5 calling for “some attention, 4-3 meaning “no attention”, and lastly 2-1 for “no attention at all”.

<sup>1</sup> that is 17 points more then the average in the EU member countries

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.delmkd.ec.europa.eu/en/bilateral-relations/EuroBarometer/EB%2067%20MK\\_Executive%20Summary\\_EN\\_280907%20fin\\_product%20.pdf](http://www.delmkd.ec.europa.eu/en/bilateral-relations/EuroBarometer/EB%2067%20MK_Executive%20Summary_EN_280907%20fin_product%20.pdf)

	No Answer	1-2 Paying no Attention at all	3-4 Paying no attention	5-6 Paying some attention	7-8 Paying attention	9-10 Paying a lot of attention
<b>EU</b>	0.95	1.36	0.68	2.44	6.19	88.41
<b>NATO</b>	2.16	1.76	1.76	6.35	13.92	74.05
<b>UN</b>	3.65	1.76	6.75	11.76	17.71	58.38
<b>Italy</b>	2.92	2.30	1.57	1.92	5.95	85.35
<b>Greece</b>	4.32	13.11	5.27	15.27	22.16	39.87
<b>Germany</b>	4.46	1.76	5.00	11.21	24.60	52.97
<b>Spain</b>	4.86	3.38	6.35	14.6	30.54	40.27
<b>France</b>	4.73	3.00	4.58	13.2	31.5	39.12
<b>USA</b>	2.30	1.89	0.54	2.57	6.76	86.22
<b>UK</b>	4.46	2.03	2.16	6.89	15.94	68.51
<b>Turkey</b>	4.46	8.78	7.57	13.79	26.89	38.52
<b>Macedonia</b>	5.00	11.76	11.62	14.73	20.27	36.62
<b>Serbia</b>	6.08	32.17	11.76	16.57	18.91	14.32
<b>Croatia</b>	5.54	12.03	11.22	18.92	20.41	31.89
<b>Montenegro</b>	5.81	11.62	11.35	15.68	20.81	34.73
<b>Kosovo</b>	3.92	3.92	1.49	3.51	9.59	77.57

Table 4. Strategic importance of organizations and countries

Along with the popular support for EU membership, the Albanian society continues to perceive the European Union as a strategic partner. Thus, 94.6 percent of the respondents think the government should see the relationship with the EU as a priority<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, a comparison with the findings of the 2005, 2006 and 2007 surveys shows this perception of the Albanian society to also be consistent<sup>10</sup>. The evaluation of the European Union as one of the most strategic partners for Albania should be explained as a result of the

<sup>9</sup> 88,41 percent and 6,19 percent think that the government should respectively pay attention and pay a lot of attention, to the relationship with the EU

<sup>10</sup> See Albania EU perceptions and Realities [www.aiis-albania.org](http://www.aiis-albania.org)

enhancement of the role, presence, and visibility of the European Union in the country as well as a reflection of the desire and determination of Albanian citizens to join Europe. The results of this year's survey confirm the trend identified in the past five-six years of a correlation between the support for membership and the percentage of citizens that consider the EU a strategic partners towards which the government should pay priority attention.

The survey shows that Albanians maintain more or less the same perception of the strategic importance that a number of countries and institutions should have for Albania. The strategic evaluation of NATO has been high throughout the last six years and has grown stronger this year, which is to be expected, given the NATO invitation of the Bucharest Summit in April. The score difference between the attention demanded for the EU versus the UN is slightly more significant, standing at 19.51 points. The United States of America maintain the same perception of strategic importance while the survey shows that the list of other strategically important states includes Italy (91.04%, attention & a lot of attention), Great Britain (84.45%, attention & a lot of attention), Germany (77.57% attention & a lot of attention), and Spain (70.81% attention & a lot of attention)<sup>11</sup>.

Dilemmas however naturally appear when it comes to the historically-influenced relations with the neighbors in the region. While integration and cooperation with the EU member states is considered important, regional cooperation with neighboring countries does not constitute a priority for Albanians and as a result is not enthusiastically demanded from the government.

With the exception of Kosova, which 87.18 % (77.57+9.59) of citizens think should be considered a priority, the level of importance that the government should attach to Macedonia, Monte Negro and Croatia are relatively low. The level is even lower when it comes to Serbia, with only 14 % of citizens seeing the relationships between the two countries as strategically important. One of the basic motives behind this attitude could be attributed to historical

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<sup>11</sup> Italy [91.04% (5.95%+85.35%)], UK [84.45% (68.51%+15.94)], Germany [77.57% (52.97%+24.6%)], Spain [70.81 (40.27%+30.54%)]

resentments and the events of 1999 in Kosovo, as Albanians may yet need time to overcome the images of the Kosovars crossing the Albanian border and asking for shelter and support in face of the Serbian oppression. The attitude of the public is however more lenient when it comes to relationships with other countries of the region. Thus, only 23.38 % (11.76+11.62) of the citizens believe that the government should pay no attention, or no attention at all to relations with Macedonia, while 14.73 % of them remain skeptical and call for some attention. 22.25 % (12.03+11.22) of the public believes the government should pay no attention or no attention at all to relations with Croatia, while 18.92% demand some attention. With Montenegro the situation is very similar; with 22.97 % (11.62+11.35) of the public considering bilateral relations not important and another 15.68 % remaining skeptical.

The attention sought in terms of the relationships with Greece, remains low and at a similar level with last year, despite the high trade volume between the two countries, the significant level of Greek investment in Albania, and the very high number of Albanian immigrants in the Greece. It seems that the views of the respondents are therefore likely influenced by a number of well-publicized incidents and negative events between the two countries. In light of EU integration, the fact that Greece still remains one of the last three countries to ratify Albania's SAA may have also influenced the perceptions towards Greece.

Overall, it is clear that Albanians are not as enthusiastic about cooperation with the neighboring countries compared to the desired cooperation with the EU member states, despite the fact that integration at the regional level is considered by the EU as the first determining stage of full membership.

## **4.2. Expecations**

### **Progress of EU Integration process**

The next area of inquiry were the expectations of citizens in regards to the progress achieved in the integration process, the effects of the Stabilization and Association Agreement and expectations about the time of membership.

The expectation of the benefits and costs of EU are determining to the respondents' attitude towards the country's accession. It must also be noted that the signing of the SAA, the problems following the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the union, the debate on enlargement fatigue and on Turkey's accession have in all likelihood played a role in shaping peoples' expectations. Other significant related developments which may have influenced the public's expectations in addition to the respective level of enthusiasm regarding the work of the government are also the receipt of NATO invitation at the Bucharest Summit, as well as the declaration of the independence of Kosovo and the changes induced in regards to the regions' EU integration. In order to put the results in perspective, the respondents were also invited to give their perceptions about the progress achieved by the other countries of the region.

The question "how much progress has Albania made in the EU integration process compared with last year?" assesses citizens' evaluation of the country's progress in the EU integration process.

*Question 13: According to you how much has Albania progressed in its integration process compared to last year?*

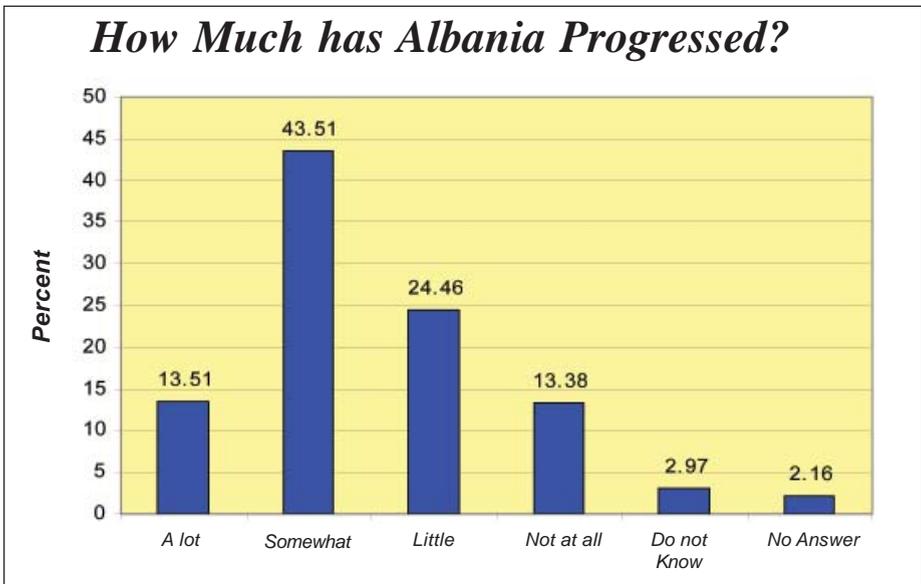


Figure 4. Albania's progress

Overall, the level of optimism about Albania's progress in the integration path has improved. The number of optimists that see a lot of progress on country's integration path has increased with about 7 points.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, a comparison with the 2007 results shows a significant decrease of 10.36 points to the group of skeptics that see little progress achieved in the integration process.

Nevertheless, as shown in the figure above, there is a big dispersion amongst answers and considerable notes of skepticism reported by the majority of the sample, likely reflecting the fact that most citizens always expect concrete results from this process. Consequently, 43.51 percent of the citizens think that Albania has progressed only somewhat. The evaluation of this group does however not differ significantly from the preceding year (42.9 %).

The importance of the perceptions of a lot of progress or no progress at all should also be viewed in the larger perspective of political beliefs, which can have a significant influence in the perceptions of achievements, especially in the part of party loyalists (for both the majority and the opposition). The boosted optimism may however also be a result of the ratification of the SAA by most European countries, the signing of the Visa Facilitation Agreement with the EU, as well as the NATO invitation.

The level of optimism regarding the country's progress in the integration process, by level of educational attainment, changes with 3.81 points in favor of non university graduates in the category of "a lot of progress" and 4.46 points in the category of "progressed somewhat". It is to be expected that university graduates are more skeptical of the country's progress in the process of integration, mainly due to their access to multi-sourced information and critical thinking nature. They score a difference of 7.27 points compared to the non-university group in the category of "little progress" and of 5.41 in the category of "not at all progress", as shown in the table below. The differences are not overwhelming and the relative skepticism of the elite about the progress in the integration process can be attributed to its skeptical and cautioned nature.

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<sup>12</sup> Rethinking European Integration, Perceptions and Realities, 2007, AIIS.

Education Level	How much Albania has progressed compared to last year	Percent
Up to University	A lot	15.97
	Somewhat	46.39
	A Little	19.77
	Not at all	9.89
	Do not Know	4.56
	No Answer	3.42
	Total	100.00
University and Higher	A lot	12.16
	Somewhat	41.93
	A Little	27.04
	Not at all	15.30
	Do not Know	2.10
	No Answer	1.47
	Total	100.00

Table 5. Albania's progress, by education

## Effects of Stabilization and Association Agreement

The respondents were also asked to evaluate the effect that they believe the Stabilization and Association Agreement has had in a number of areas. We can notice from the table below that 50.81 percent of the citizens perceive positive effects in terms of foreign investments and 47.84 percent in the opening of the markets. There is however hesitation when it comes to positive expected effects on the development of agriculture (48.78 percent of negative answers) and the strengthening of the competition in the market and of local economy (41.62 percent of negative answers). The situation is slightly more balanced in regards to improvements in the visa regime, with 42.84 being skeptical and another 32.43 percent seeing improvement. Non-opinionated respondents are distributed almost equally among all categories. The Table below summarizes the distribution of expectations according to all categories.

*Question 20: Do you think that the signing of the SAA has influenced in any of the areas below?*

Do you think the Signing of SAA has influenced	Opening of the Market	Strengthening of the Competition in the market and of Local Economy	Visa Regime	Increase of Foreign Investment	Development of Agriculture
Yes	47.84	27.57	32.43	50.81	16.89
No	24.19	41.62	42.84	18.78	48.78
Do not Know	8.38	8.65	3.11	10.00	11.62
No Answer	19.59	22.16	21.62	20.41	22.70
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

*Table 6. Effects of SAA*

The percentage of the citizens that offer “no answer” is rather high, accounting for almost one fifth of the sample. This situation could be related to the lack of information and knowledge that citizens have regarding the meaning of the SAA and consequently to all related developments. The “do not know” answers lie in the 8.38%-11.62% interval for all categories, except for the case of visa regimes, where Albanians seem more aware (3.11% answered “do not know”).

### **Expected year of membership**

Approximately 71.89 percent of citizens expect the country to enter the EU by the year 2010 or 2015 at most (24.19+47.7%). Compared to last year, the number of Albanians believing that the country will join the Union by 2015 has increased by 22 percent, while the group expecting membership in the year 2010 has increased by almost 50 percent<sup>13</sup>. Overall, the data shows Albanians are eager to join the EU and see 2015 as the most likely year of membership.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> AIIS Survey 2007.

<sup>14</sup> In the survey of 2007, 37% of the respondents believed that Albanian will join the EU by 2015, while 12.1% of them considered 2010 as the possible year of membership.

It is interesting to note that this question received no “no answer” responses, suggesting that Albanians are all interested in the potential date of EU accession and have by now made their mind on the likeliest date. The matching of expectations with reality on this point is therefore rather important and should, as such, be taken seriously in consideration by politicians.

*“According to you Albania will enter the European Union within which year?”*

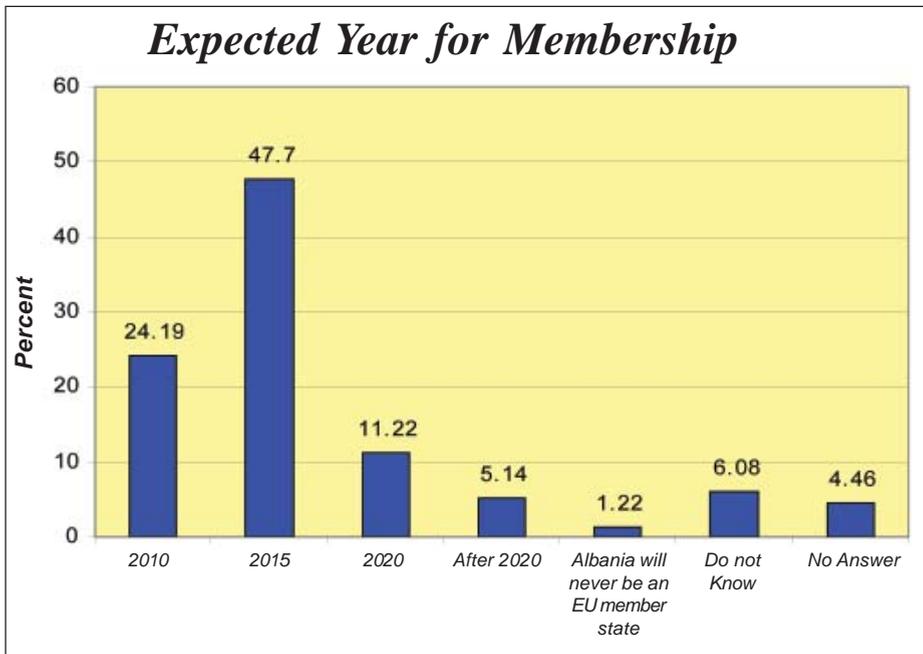


Figure 5. Expected year of membership

The expectation of the citizens about the year of membership does however vary according to level of education, gender, age and employment.

Although there is general agreement between university and non-university graduates on the year 2015 as the likeliest year of membership, university graduates remain slightly more skeptical. Thus, respectively 20.13 percent of university graduates versus 31.54 percent of non-university graduates perceive 2010 as the likeliest date of membership, 49.90 percent of university graduates

versus 43.73 percent of non-university graduates sense 2015 the likeliest date of membership, 13.63 percent of university graduates versus 6.84 percent of non-university graduates consider 2020 as the likeliest date of membership, and 6.08 percent of university graduates versus 3.42 percent of non-university graduates picture the possible membership after 2020, as shown in the table below.

*Question 21*

*When do you think Albania will enter the EU by education group*

Expected Year for Membership	Education Level	
	Up to University	University and Higher
2010	31.56	20.13
2015	43.73	49.90
2020	6.84	13.63
After 2020	3.42	6.08
Albania will never be an EU member state	0.38	1.68
Do not Know	9.51	4.19
No Answer	4.56	4.40
Total	100.00	100.00

*Table 7. Expected year of membership, by education*

In contrast to last year, when male and female respondents had similar expectations, this year’s data also depicts female respondents to be more skeptical about early membership than male respondents, which is seen across the selection options. Thus 23.85% of females expect membership in 2010 compared to 25.27% of males, 45.40% of females expect membership in 2015 compared to 49.73% of the males, while 13.25 % of females vs. 9.03% of the males see the year 2010 as the likeliest year of membership into the EU.

The distribution of answers by gender, to the Question 21: *When do you think Albania will enter the EU*, is detailed in the table below:

*Question 21: When do you think Albania will enter the EU*

Gender	Expected year for membership	Percent
MALE	2010	25.27
	2015	49.73
	2020	9.04
	After 2020	5.85
	Albania will never be a EU member state	1.33
	Don't Know	5.32
	No Answer	3.46
	Total	100.00
FEMALE	2010	23.85
	2015	45.40
	2020	13.22
	After 2020	4.02
	Albania will never be a EU member state	1.15
	Don't Know	7.18
	No Answer	5.17
	Total	100.00
No Gender	Declaration 2010	6.25
	2015	50.00
	2020	18.75
	After 2020	12.50
	Albania will never be a EU member state	0.00
	Don't Know	0.00
	No Answer	12.50
	Total	100.00

*Table 8. Expected year of membership, by gender*

The distribution of scores by age is fairly even. Almost half of the respondents' regardless of age think that Albania will enter the EU by year 2015. Like last year, older respondents remain most optimistic about early accession, while the youngest responders are most pessimistic. Thus, the age group 18-24 made for most of the choices for year 2020 (14.89 percent), while the age-group with the lowest "2020" picks was "55 years of age and older" (3.37 percent).

Expected year for membership	Age Group					No Answer
	18 - 24	25 - 35	36 - 45	46 - 55	Over 55	No Answer
2010	16.49	23.03	21.52	36.00	29.21	100.00
2015	49.47	51.69	48.73	42.40	42.70	0.00
2020	14.89	10.67	10.13	12.00	5.62	0.00
After 2020	5.32	6.18	5.06	4.80	3.37	0.00
Albania will never be a EU member state	2.13	1.12	1.27	0.00	1.12	0.00
Don't Know	5.32	3.37	10.13	4.00	8.99	0.00
No Answer	6.38	3.93	3.16	0.80	8.99	0.00

Table 9. Expected year of membership, by age

Occupation also accounts for notable differences in the expectations of the likeliest date of membership. Housepersons, pensioners and students see the year 2015 as the likeliest year of membership (respectively 56 percent, 51.92 percent and 51.68 percent), while the unemployed seem the most pessimistic.

Expected year for membership	Current Employment Status						No Answer
	Employed	Unemployed	Student	Pensioner	House person	Other	
2010	28.06	24.39	16.11	23.08	12.50	28.57	0.00
2015	46.76	40.24	51.68	51.92	56.25	42.86	0.00
2020	11.51	7.32	16.78	1.92	9.38	0.00	0.00
After 2020	4.56	9.76	4.70	3.85	3.13	14.29	0.00
Albania will never be a EU member state	1.20	3.66	0.00	1.92	0.00	0.00	0.00
Don't Know	4.32	9.76	6.04	3.85	18.75	14.29	100.00
No Answer	3.60	4.88	4.70	13.46	0.00	0.00	0.00

Table 10. Expected year of membership, by employment status

## Readiness to join EU

Although optimism on the date of accession was high, the majority of Albanians (52.03%) however believe that the country is not yet ready for EU membership, while a rather large part either “does not know” (16.21%) or has “no answer” (3.78%) to the question “*Is Albania ready for EU membership?*”.

Despite the general objectivity shown by half of the sample, these perceptions are nevertheless surprisingly more positive than those of the year 2007, where 14 % of the sample believed the country was ready, compared to 82.8 % who did not consider the country to be ready for accession. The group who is unsure of the stand of the country is also five times larger than in 2007. The explanation for the rise in both optimism and ambiguity regarding the country’s readiness for accession could rest with the implementation of the SAA and the visa facilitation agreement on one hand, as well as the Romania-Bulgaria, NATO and Kosovo related developments on the other.

These scores also help explain the results on the expected time of membership, which more than half of the respondents see happen 7 years from now.

*Question 11: Is Albania ready for EU?*

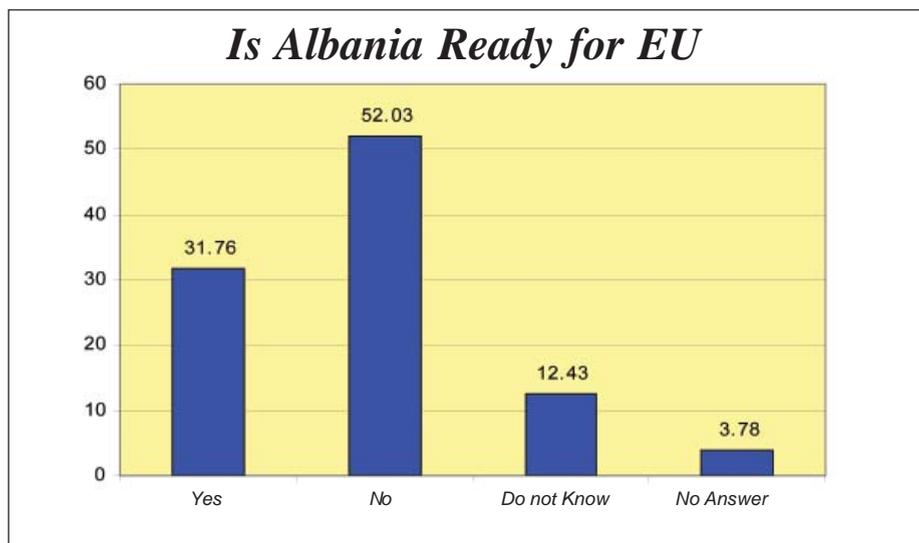


Figure 6. Albania’s readiness for membership

The distribution of answers according to the respondents' level of education shows important opinion differences between university graduates and non-university graduates as far as Albania's perceived readiness for membership into the EU is concerned. 15.82 percent more university graduates than non-university graduates believe that the country is not ready for EU membership. This disparity could be attributed to the fact that the better educated and informed groups of society are more aware of the real situation of the country's progress in the process of integration.

*Is Albania Ready for EU by education group*

Education	Albania is Ready for EU	Percent
Up to University	Yes	38.78
	No	41.83
	Do not Know	17.11
	No Answer	2.28
	Total	100.00
University and Higher	Yes	27.88
	No	57.65
	Do not Know	9.85
	No Answer	4.61
	Total	100.00

*Table 11. Readiness for membership, by education*

Opinions about the progress towards EU membership made by the neighboring countries vary, but are generally better than last year's dim picture, when respondents believed that Albania lags behind all other countries in the region. This year, the respondents continue to believe that Croatia, followed by Turkey and Montenegro have achieved much better progress than Albania (respectively, believed by 73.51 percent, 55.54 percent and 43.78 percent of respondents).

In contrast with last year, however, the public also believes that Albania has made better progress than Serbia, Macedonia and Bosnia & Herzegovina. However, 25.95 to 12.97 percent of respondents do not know about the

progress in the process of integration made by the neighbor countries while another 5.14 to 3.38 percent have no answer.

The generally more positive political climate in the country and the perception of better domestic progress may have lead to the easing of the frustration that we believe last year lead to the positioning of Albania behind Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. The negative perception on the fare of Macedonia, which is a candidate country, seems to have however been affected by the name conflict with Greece and the failure to receive an invitation to join NATO.

*Question 14: Do you think Albania has progressed in its European integration process better than the following?*

Albania has Progressed Better Than						
	Macedonia	Croatia	Serbia	Bosnia & Herzegovina	Montenegro	Turkey
YES	54.19	8.78	55.95	45.41	34.46	21.89
NO	29.32	73.51	25.81	23.65	43.78	55.54
Don't Know	13.11	12.97	14.46	25.95	16.62	18.38
No Answer	3.38	4.73	3.78	5.00	5.14	4.19

*Table 12. Albania's progress compared to other countries*

University graduates are more objective about progress in the process of EU integration of the other neighboring countries. Thus, university graduates (80.08%) score a difference of 18.48 points compare to non-university graduates in believing that Croatia is much closer to membership because of the progress it has achieved in implementing the requirements of integration process. The difference is especially apparent in the category of “do not know” and “no answer”, where in the case of Macedonia, Croatia and Montenegro non-university graduates score higher points than university graduates. The situation is more balanced in the case of Serbia and Bosnia & Herzegovina, both graduates and non-graduates feel they miss the necessary information to make a judgment. The table below provides detailed information about the perceived progress of neighboring countries.

*Question 14 by education group: Albania has progressed better than...*

Albania has progressed better than							
Education Level		Macedonia	Croatia	Serbia	Bosnia & Herzegovina	Montenegro	Turkey
Up to University	Yes	52.09	12.93	57.41	42.21	33.84	23.57
	No	27.76	61.60	23.19	25.10	40.30	47.53
	Do not Know	16.35	18.63	14.07	25.48	18.25	22.81
	No Answer	3.80	6.84	5.32	7.22	7.60	6.08
	Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
University and Higher	Yes	55.35	6.50	55.14	47.17	34.80	20.96
	No	30.19	80.08	27.25	22.85	45.70	59.96
	Do not Know	11.32	9.85	14.68	26.21	15.72	15.93
	No Answer	3.14	3.56	2.94	3.77	3.77	3.14
	Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 13. Albania's progress compared to other countries, by education

### 4.3. Understanding Determining Factors Of Integration

To garner perceptions about determining factors of the EU integration process, the respondents were asked to rate a number of priorities in answering: "What is more important for Albania's accession to the EU?". Their estimation was expressed in a scale of 1-10 points, in a distribution where: very significant 10-9, significant 8-7, somewhat significant 6-5, not significant 4-3, not significant at all 2-1.

The majority of the respondents, almost evenly, see corruption (73.78% + 10.94 % choosing important and very important), free and fair elections (72,79% + 12.16 %) and Albanian politics (64.60% + 19.32 %) as the major obstacles to the country's integration process. The other four issues listed as barriers to the membership of the country in the EU are: dysfunctional rule of law (69.19% + 13.64 %), followed closely by organized crime & trafficking

(65.40% + 14.73 %) and the economy (49.6% + 30.81 %). In any case it must also be noted that the differences in the percentage points received by these factors were minimal. The situation in the region (32.16% + 11.63 %) ranked eighth, while 47.29 percent of the respondents do not consider religion to be a hindrance to the accession process.

The findings are generally in line with those of last year<sup>15</sup>, as citizens rank political criteria as most important. The group of the first five factors is the same, while the ranking has slightly changed in favor of Albanian politics (from 5<sup>th</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> place) and disfavor of organized crime (from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> place).

The fact that political factors are deemed more important than other factors more tangible to everyday life suggest that the political situation in the country, the EU progress evaluations and warnings in regards to political criteria and the forthcoming general elections have strongly influenced the perceptions of citizens, a fact that should also serve as a warning to the country's political class. Like last year, the economy is not assigned due importance, testifying to a rather serious misunderstanding of the importance that the economic situation has on the progress of aspiring countries.

The findings again show that the respondents place most emphasis on domestic rather than external factors, indicating a high level of maturity and high awareness of the importance that the EU attaches to these factors. Whether right or wrong, respondents seem to believe that the EU will judge Albania on its own merit, which is positive in terms of expectations and level of local ownership. This is also supported by the fact that the situation in the region ranks 8th and religious composition is considered the least important factor.

The question of the religion factor is similar to last year, with roughly 1/3 of the respondents viewing it as important while more than half of the sample considers religious composition to be an irrelevant factor for integration. These results show that the discussion on Turkey's accession have not had a great impact in

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<sup>15</sup> 2007 ranking: Corruption, elections, organized crime, rule of law, Albanian politics

the citizens' perceptions, but that at the same time, some concern that religion may influence the country's accession bid does exist. Nevertheless, the fact that the majority of respondents ranked religion as unimportant to integration, confirms the remarkable level of religious tolerance in the country and likely, the citizen's expectations of reciprocity from the EU.

Despite the similarity in ranking, the results show that the situation has however improved from last year if we compare only the "very significant" scores. Thus, corruption scores 16.02 less than last year, dysfunctional rule of law 13.81 points, problems with the organization of free and fair elections 11.04 points and Albanian Politics with 16.02 points less than in 2007.<sup>16</sup> The change can be translated as an expression of boosted citizen confidence in the reforms that aim the fighting corruption and organized crime and the organization of free elections.

*Question 18: Albania's accession to the EU depends on many factors. According to you how important are the following factors?*

	No Answer	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10
Albanian politics	2.97	3.65	3.25	6.21	19.32	64.60
Albanian economy	3.38	2.84	4.33	9.05	30.81	49.60
Situation in the region	6.62	4.06	7.30	24.46	25.41	32.16
Religious composition	6.76	47.29	7.97	10.68	11.63	15.67
Corruption	4.59	3.65	1.76	5.27	10.94	73.78
Progress of decentralization	8.38	3.92	6.35	15.81	32.03	33.52
Organized crime and trafficking	5.27	4.19	3.11	7.29	14.73	65.40
Dysfunctional rule of law	5.68	3.51	1.35	6.62	13.64	69.19
Free and fair elections	5.27	2.30	2.70	4.60	12.16	72.97

Table 14. Factors for EU Accession

<sup>16</sup> In the survey 2007, 89.9 percent of the Albanians considered corruption as the main problem of the country followed by the dysfunctional rule of law with 83 percent, organization of free elections with 84.01 percent, organized crime with 81.8 percent and Albanian politics with 80.8 percent of interviewees.

To further specify the understanding of determining factors of integration, the respondents were also asked to prioritize in response to question 16: *in which of these areas should Albania focus more in order to be integrated in the EU?* Four basic options that cover the chief segments of the reforms that Albania is implementing in the framework of the EU integration process: economy (economic development and standard of living), rule of law (war on corruption and organized crime), the judiciary (reforms in legal system and law abiding) and democratization (election process), were offered for selection.

*In which of these areas should Albania focus more in order to be integrated in the EU?*

<i>Albania Needs to focus more for the EU Integration</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Economic Development	23.24
War on corruption and organized crime	34.59
Improvement of the living standards	13.78
Reforms in the legal system	2.43
Election processes	2.30
Law Abiding of all Governmental Institutions	18.92
Other	1.35
Do not Know	3.11
No Answer	0.27
Total	100.00

*Table 15. Priority area for Accession*

Citizens give highest priority to the war on corruption and organized crime (34.59 percent), followed by economic development (23,4 percent), and improvement of the standard of living (13.78 percent). The ranking of these factors is the same as in 2007, although the lower percentages for each factor<sup>17</sup> suggest perceptions of improvement in these regards.

<sup>17</sup> 2007 survey: corruption and organized crime - 43.4 %, economic development 32.1 %, and improvement of the standard of living 14.2 %.

As in 2007, this year citizens continue to attach surprisingly low importance to the reform of the legal system and election processes, which are however closely linked to war on corruption and organized crime, which was considered the most important factor. This suggests that citizens view these fields as more technical and are influenced by the fact that the fight against corruption and organized crime has for long been misused and remained at the level of political rhetoric and propaganda.

In regards to elections, the change in power in 2005, the 2007 local elections, and the initial stages of consensus on the electoral reform between the two main parties, at the time of the conduction of the survey, suggest that citizens believe progress has been made in this regard.

Again, the results show that due importance is not given to economic and living-standard factors. Despite the recent problems witnessed after the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in the union, Albanian citizens seem to consider economic development as a benefit rather than a prerequisite of integration. Considering the potential negative effects that this can have on the level of support and willingness to implement costly economic reforms, more should be done in stressing the importance of economic development and standards of living by the media, EU institutions and Albanian politicians and decision-makers.

#### **4.4. Information And Awareness**

The results discussed until now have pointed out a number of misunderstandings of the integration process and that these problems are similar to those noted in the previous years. This section therefore seeks to look at more depth at the basic information and knowledge that citizens have regarding Albania's integration path as well as its membership in international organizations.

Given that misunderstandings can result from lack of interest, lack of access, misinformation and other factors, it is also important to identify the sources of information about the integration process.

Responding to the question, “*has the Stabilization and Association Agreement between Albania and the European Union has been signed?*”, 81.89 percent of the citizens responded accurately compared to 4.05 percent that provided a wrong answer. However, 11.89 percent of the respondents “do not know” that Albanian did sign the SAA in 2006. This is a relatively high percentage given the fact that this opinion poll was conducted two years after Albania signed the SAA and is expecting its ratification to be completed in early 2009.

<i>Has Albania Signed SAA</i>	<i>% of Total N</i>
Yes	81.89
No	4.05
Do not Know	11.89
No Answer	2.16
Total	100.00

*Table 16. Has Albania signed the SAA?*

Very limited progress is noted if the results are compared to the survey of the year 2007. Thus, the number of informed respondents has increased by 1.19 points, the number of the respondents that provide a wrong answer has decreased by 3.15 points, while the number of the ones that “do not know” has decreased by 0.31 points. Thus, although, 95% of the Albanians support membership into the EU, this has not translated in higher interest in the level of progress achieved in the integration process.

The level of education also seems determining in this regard. The majority of university graduates (88.05%) give correct answers compared with non university graduates (70.72 %). There is also a striking disparity of 15.75 points between university graduates and non-graduate respondents in the choice of “do not know” answers.

*Table for Question 19: Awareness of the responders on Albania signing the Stability Association Agreement by education group*

Education	Albania has signed SAA	Percent
Up to University	Yes	70.72
	No	4.18
	Do not Know	21.67
	No Answer	3.42
	Total	100.00
University and Higher	Yes	88.05
	No	3.98
	Do not Know	6.50
	No Answer	1.47
	Total	100.00

*Table 17. Has Albania signed the SAA? by education*

The findings show that the majority of the public, 82.03 percent, knows that Albania is not a member of the EU. However the situation has deteriorated compared to one year ago, when 94.4 percent of the interviewees offered a correct answer. The same situation applies to membership in NATO, where the situation of knowledge has deteriorated with 4.6 points compared with a year before. These findings suggest that the information on the steps forward in terms of EU and NATO integration are misunderstood or incomplete, potentially leading a considerable part of the population to believe that the SAA with the EU and the invitation to join NATO amount to membership in these organizations.

Improvements are seen in the answers about UN and OSCE as the right-answer percentages have increased with 10.61 points and 16.3 points respectively. The table below provides a fuller picture of the results.

*Question 5: Is Albania a member of?*

Member?	NATO %	OSCE %	UN %	EU %	WTO %	The Council of Europe %
Yes	27.43	70.00	73.11	6.08	58.11	34.73
No	66.08	13.24	13.51	82.03	13.38	40.27
Do not Know	3.65	12.84	8.51	6.62	24.32	19.73
No Answer	2.84	3.92	4.86	5.27	4.19	5.27
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

*Table 18. Awareness of membership in international organizations*

Not surprisingly, the classification by the level of education shows that university graduates are better informed about the membership of the country in different organizations than non university graduates. The major difference (18.13 points) is scored in the case of EU membership. The scores of the tables above favor the assumption that better educated categories are better informed.

Regardless of the frequency of information that circulates in the multitude of channels of communication regarding the EU, a lack of accurate knowledge is still evident. This suggests the situation to be more of a question of awareness and digestibility of information, than of a lack of sources and access, thus potentially calling for information that better targets the general population.

*Is Albania a member of-by education group*

Education Level	Member?	NATO %	OSCE %	UN %	EU %	WTO %	The Council of Europe %
Up to University	Yes	29.66	60.08	68.82	9.51	52.09	34.60
	No	58.56	15.21	12.17	70.34	9.89	35.36
	Do not Know	9.13	21.67	12.93	14.07	34.60	26.24
	No Answer	2.66	3.04	6.08	6.08	3.42	3.80
	Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
University and Higher	Yes	26.21	75.47	75.47	4.19	61.43	34.80
	No	70.23	12.16	14.26	88.47	15.30	42.98
	Do not Know	0.63	7.97	6.08	2.52	18.66	16.14
	No Answer	2.94	4.40	4.19	4.82	4.61	6.08
	Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 19. Awareness of membership in international organizations, by education

*Question 22: How much information on the European Union do you receive from the following sources?*

	No Answer	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10
TV						
Radio	8.65	20.13	11.89	17.43	20.67	21.22
Newspapers	5.68	8.24	6.62	13.65	22.70	43.10
Internet	9.32	25.81	9.32	12.30	12.03	13.21
EU Delegation in Albania	9.73	37.56	15.54	14.32	13.65	9.19
Government/Ministry of EU Integration	8.65	37.57	14.87	14.46	13.79	10.67
Organizations/Institution where you work	12.16	47.98	13.11	11.90	6.75	8.11
Embassies/International Organizations	10.81	43.79	16.08	11.35	10.68	7.30
Research Institutions or NGOs	10.00	44.73	14.06	12.43	11.76	7.03

Table 20. Sources of information

The misunderstandings and misperceptions encountered become clearer when one considers the sources of information for society at large, the first of which are TV stations, followed by the press and the internet. The information provided by these wide-reaching but not-necessarily credible sources of information is not adequately balanced by institutional and academic sources of information, be that of the government, civil society organizations, or the EU Delegation in Albania.

## V. METHODOLOGY

The 2008 survey was conducted with a sample of 1,000 citizens (age ee 18 years) by the Albanian Institute of International Studies (AIIS). The random sample of interviewees was selected proportionally to Albania’s electoral districts, while interviews were conducted face-to-face in urban areas.

The results of the report are statistically estimated means within respective 95%-confidence intervals which determines the accuracy of estimations for the whole country and has to be kept in mind regarding comparisons to previous surveys values. For the analysis of the public opinion regarding EU and issues of EU integration materials from 2007 survey are used for the analysis.

The selection of the sample kept in mind balancing gender categories. The number of males is slightly larger than that of females, but his difference is not considered important for the quality of the survey. Details about gender composition of the sample are shown in the following table.

*Gender Distribution of the responders*

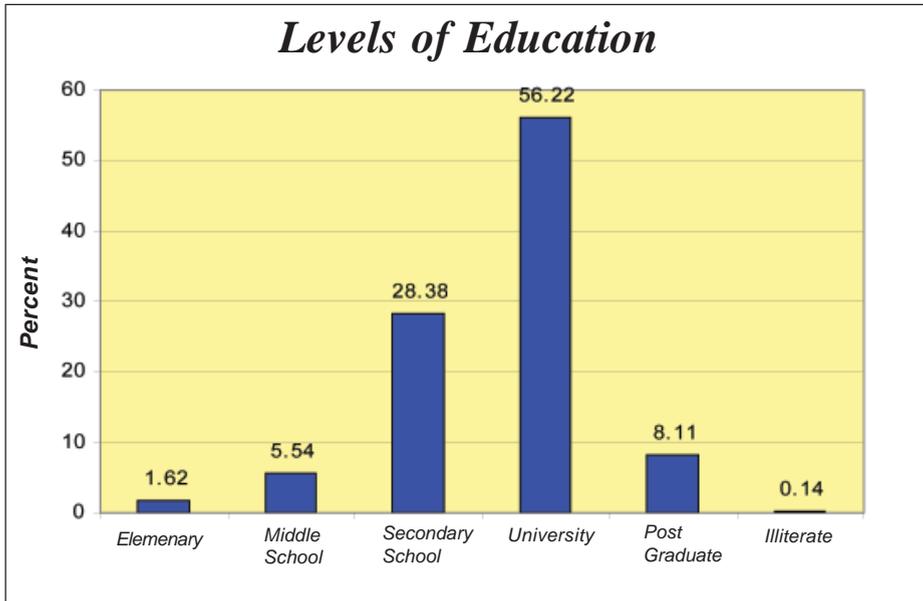
Identification No	
Gender	% of Total N
Male	50.81
Female	47.03
Not Verified	2.16
Total	100.00

*Table 21. Gender distribution*

The sample also seems balanced according to the level of education of the respondents, despite the slight dominance of university graduates, which

together with university post-graduates compose 64,33 (56.22%+8.11%) percent of the sample. These differences in the level of education are extensively taken into consideration to analyze the answers of respondents in different categories of questions. A detailed composition of the sample is presented in more detail by the below table.

*Graph of Groups of Education Level in Percent*



*Figure 7. Educational level*

The sample was also composed of different categories of employment status. More than half of the interviewees are both employed and university graduates. The second major category is that of students and constitutes 20 percent of the sample.

The details of the sample by educational level are as follows:

Current Employment Status	Education Level				Table Total	
	Up to University		University and Higher			
	Col %	Row %	Col %	Row %	Col %	Row %
Employed	57.03	35.97	55.97	64.03	56.35	100.00
Unemployed	20.91	67.07	5.66	32.93	11.08	100.00
Student	4.94	8.72	28.51	91.28	20.14	100.00
Retired	7.98	40.38	6.50	59.62	7.03	100.00
House person	8.37	68.75	2.10	31.25	4.32	100.00
Other	0.76	28.57	1.05	71.43	0.95	100.00
No Answer	0.00	0.00	0.21	100.00	0.14	100.00
Total	100.00	35.54	100.00	64.46	100.00	100.00

Table 22. Education level by employment status

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