



Albanian-Kosovo relation: Quo Vadis?

Dr. Ilir Kalemaj

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Ilir Kalemaj Ph.D

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Executive Summary

This study seeks to explore the relations between Albania and Kosovo as they stand at the present and the likely trajectory they are going to take in the near future. The point of departure is the study of these relations from February 2008 when Kosovo proclaimed its independence and how the process of Kosovo`s recognition and state-building have influenced and conditioned its relationship with Albania. The discussion has involved the mainstream elite in both countries and several proposals have emerged since. On the other hand, a related debate on a Kosovar identity as a rather exclusive and new one versus the traditional understanding of the undivided Albanian identity seems to develop simultaneously with the participation of a substantial part of political and cultural elite on both sides of the border.

In this framework, stereotypes about “Great Albania” and unification of Kosovo with Albania persist and are part of the discourse in the Balkans, especially neighbors such as Serbia which have expressed certain fears about such developments. This phenomenon had seen attempts made by governments of both Albania and Kosovo, whose effects remain to be seen, ranging from unification of school curricula and textbooks to unification of consulates in certain countries to an energy union between the two countries. On the other hand, polls made by international organization, as well as local organization in Albania and whose data is presented below, do not support any popular support for “Greater Albania”, so fears mentioned above remain without a solid base.

However, recent evidence that is going to be duly analyzed in this study, testifies for a rising nationalist fervor in Albania versus a decline in Kosovo, which also relates to how masses and elites view the Albania-Kosovo future. It is the goal of this study to make an assessment of key internal and external factors that will influence the future of relations between Tirana and

Pristina and make projections for possible scenarios of the bilateral relations in the next twenty to thirty years. These four scenarios are the following:

- A. Kosovo and Albania borders become gradually irrelevant as part of European Union if both are integrated at that stage.
- B. Albania and Kosovo are part of one of the following regional proposals (i.e. Balkan Union, Balkan Benelux, CEFTA etc.), but only one of them (most probably Albania) is part of EU.
- C. Albania and Kosovo realize a *de facto* unification before accession in the European Union.
- D. Albania and Kosovo operate as two functional countries without any projected unification of any kind, where Albania joins EU, with Kosovo still to conclude state-building process.

I will show here that the scenario most likely to happen in the next ten years period is the last scenario while the scenario the most likely will develop in the next decade after that is the B scenario. I base this selection on the findings I have accumulated through desk analyses and focus group that is used to test my hypotheses and which one most likely will develop as a scenario in the short and medium term period.

Introduction

Recent violence in Belgrade stadium where Albania was playing Serbia for European Qualifying Championship brought once again the 'powder keg' epithet that Balkans infamously enjoys. Racist and xenophobic chores of Serbian football fans that culminated with "ubij, ubij Albanian" [kill, kill the Albanian] were juxtaposed by flying flag of Greater Albania as an open provocation to Serbs since it portrayed not only Kosovo as part of Albania, but also areas in Southern Serbia. The events escalated with verbal attacks between Tirana and Belgrade and the visit of primer Rama was postponed with three weeks. Even more importantly, it was made possible only after direct intervention of the German Chancellor Merkel who called both leaders and urged them to continue with the pledge undertaken some time ago in Berlin, in the so-called Berlin Agenda for Western Balkans integration.

Albania's prime minister visit in Belgrade was attended with much curiosity, expectations and attention from both domestic audiences in Serbia and Albania, as well as international interlocutors which made possible this visit in the first place. The culmination of the visit was in the press conference of the two leaders, where Rama declared that "[w]e have two entirely different positions on Kosovo, but the reality is one and unchangeable," and adding that "[i]ndependent Kosovo is an undeniable regional and European reality, and it must be respected," Serbia's premier responded by saying that "[a]ccording to the constitution Kosovo is Serbia and I am obliged to say that no one can humiliate Serbia." To which Rama responded: "I'm sorry, but that is the reality that many recognize. The sooner you recognize (that), the sooner we can move ahead."¹ These heated exchanges left in shadow the concrete achievements which were several deals that regulated the freedom of movement from citizens of countries, youth

¹ See for a detailed view the coverage in international press, including prestigious media such as CNN, BBC, Washington Post etc. The following exchange is quoted from Reuters: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/10/us-serbia-albania-kosovo-idUSKCN0IU16W20141110>

exchange and mutual diploma recognitions, as well as removing some trade barriers and coordinating police patrols in customs. But Rama also alleviated Serbia's fear of Albania's blocking role for Serbia in Euro-Atlantic forums, by explicitly saying that Albania will not block Serbia's entrance in NATO.²

Even before the visit of premier Rama in Presevo valley, a Serbian territory mostly inhabited by ethnic Albanians, the Albanian ambassador in Kosovo, Qemal Minxhozi felt the need to be explicit: "Albania does not have in its agenda the 'Greater Albania' but instead the European integration."³ But in the same interview he adds that until the end of the present year, a unified standard between Albania and Kosovo regarding agricultural products will be reached and the same would be for several of other matters between the two countries.⁴ This shows how Kosovo is continuing to be a crucial matter and a bone of contention in relations between Albania and Serbia but also the ambiguity of Tirana in relations to Kosovo.

Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia on February 17, 2008. Despite a strong objection from Serbia that was using diplomatic means to persuade countries not to recognize Kosovo, currently it is recognized by 106 countries worldwide. Additionally Serbia and Kosovo with mediation of the EU reached in April 2013 a key agreement in normalizing relations by stipulating the abolishment of parallel institutions and the setting up of Municipalities of Serb majority community, which will function in accordance with the Kosovo laws.

Kosovo's relation to Albania as its 'mother country' has been an everlasting question that has been especially salient in the decades that followed the uprising of 1981. Following Milosević's ethnic cleansing and Albania's hospitality for its Kosovar brethren under the

²<http://www.top-channel.tv/new/lajme/artikull.php?id=287595#rel>

³<http://www.gazetatema.net/web/2014/10/31/minxhozi-rama-do-te-shkoje-edhe-ne-presheve-nuk-kemi-ne-axhende-shqiperine-e-madhe/>

⁴*Ibid*

auspices of UN and other international organization, the relations between now two equal states have been steady, friendly and often coordinated in matters of foreign policy, security etc. But these areas of close cooperation have clearly not been enough for nationalist and irredentists on both sides of borders, be that charismatic individuals, political parties or social movement groups. Debates on Kosovar identity as a separate one from the all-encompassing Albanian one have been taken place time after time, like the ones organized by Java in Pristina several years ago with its main spokesperson Migjen Kelmendi but also other public figures such as columnist Halil Matoshi etc. Even recently a similar debate about an Albanian inclusive nation versus a new and unique Kosovar one has taken place in the public arena, with distinguished Kosovo intellectuals writing for major dailies in both Kosovo and Albania. Such is the example of Shkelzen Maliqi, a leading Kosovo analyst and adviser of Primer Rama for Western Balkan region who writes *inter alia*:

“It is the misinterpretation of the nation that creates confusion. The term ‘nation’ in itself incorporates all the ones that live in a state, notwithstanding their ethnic origin. In this sense, Kosovo nation should be composed of ethnic Albanians, but also Serbs, Turks, Roma etc (2014). But in the long standing tradition, the ethnic Albanian communities and people have identified themselves as Albanian nation, despite the fact of residency. They are a nation wherever they happen to live- in Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Presevo valley and in various diasporas (Maliqi 2014).

He further develops his logic by adding a more theoretical input on the matter and how to understand the state-nation nexus. Thus he adds:

According to the logic of some: because Kosovo is a new state, then we must have a new Kosovo nation; the Albanian nation exists only in Albania; in Macedonia, the Albanians should be considered with Macedonian nationality; the ones in Presevo valley as Serbs and so on... Kosovars of all ethnic compositions or nationalities will accept to be called Kosovar citizens but we should not allow a forced acceptance of Kosovar nationality on Serb minority. Also the Albanians of Macedonia do not refuse to be citizens of Macedonia, but they are categorical against a Macedonian nationality. Some Kosovo intellectuals’ narrative projects nationality and also a Kosovar language that should be separated from the Albanian trunk. I think that this is an

absurd tendency. Because history has been unfair to us, they want culture to be unfair to us as well (Maliqi 2014).

Nexhmedin Spahiu, a renowned analyst from Mitrovica directly rebuked Maliqi's claim by writing that "Shkelzen Maliqi, same as the former Serbian President Tadić, does not recognize the existence of a Kosovar nation." He continues by adding that "a Kosovar nation is defined 20 years ago from him and in science the copyright goes to the one that first operationalizes a term." For Spahiu the Kosovar nation is made only of the Albanian community of Kosovo, thus excluding Serbs, Roma, Turks, etc. He claims to be on the same line with Marti Ahtissari's plan. He grounds his argument on the fact that Kosovo has its own national library, national theatre, national football team, as well as national political parties which differently from the minority parties have to gain more than 5 percent of the votes to pass the parliamentary threshold (Spahiu 2014).

This up to date discussion about the identity of a Kosovar nation includes both an internal and an external dimension. The internal one has to do with Kosovo being an inclusive or exclusive entity vis-à-vis its non-Albanian ethnic groups, while the external aspect is directly related to the presumed relationship Kosovo should have with Albania. What these authors project in this short rebukes to each other is a view of what should be the future of the new state. Should it stand alone and try to develop a new identity through state formation mechanisms that anticipate nation-building? Or should it rather base the concept of the state on the predominantly Albanian nation and thus leave open the opportunity for a potential unification of the two Albanian states?

Between these two extreme positions there is of course, an additional salient element to be considered is the integration process in European Union. Other proxies include the position of Serbia, the sensitivities of Macedonia because of its large Albanian community and other neighboring countries concerns if Albania-Kosovo potential federalization goes under way. The

EU integration process in itself is considered by a non-significant part of Kosovar political spectrum, as well as public opinion as a facilitator of de facto unification amongst the two states and their respective citizens. An example of this is *Vetvendosja*, the third largest party in Kosovo but considered the main opposition party and in charge of the capital city whose belief is that the integration process will enable the two countries to finally come together. This is a view shared by their counterparts in Albania, such as *Aleanca Kuqez* and *Lista Natyrale*, although of much lesser political effect. The majority in both sides of the border and mainstream political parties actually believe that no border change will take place, or that borders themselves will be irrelevant when finally Albania, Kosovo and the rest of the region will become part of the European family. But in both of these last scenarios, Kosovo and Albania will not end up together in a federation, confederation or whatever form desired by nationalists.

I. Expected findings

Ideas for a common economic commonwealth between Albania and Kosovo are not new and have been articulated time after time from political leaders, such as Arbën Xhaferri or Behgjet Pacolli, but have not been taken seriously until the new attempts that are undertaken recently. There are other attempts that are undertaken whose effects remain to be seen, ranging from unification of school curricula and textbooks to unification of consulates in certain countries to an energy union between the two countries. Depending on how successful these attempts are properly delivered, the following projections can take place in the next 20-30 years:

- E. Kosovo and Albania borders become gradually irrelevant as part of European Union if both are integrated at that stage.

- F. Albania and Kosovo are part of one of the following regional proposals (i.e. Balkan Union, Balkan Benelux, CEFTA etc.), but only one of them (most probably Albania) is part of EU.
- G. Albania and Kosovo realize a *de facto* unification before accession in the European Union.
- H. Albania and Kosovo operate as two functional countries without any projected unification of any kind, where Albania joins EU, with Kosovo still to conclude state-building process.

These and other potential scenarios will be evaluated in this study, in order to measure the effects and the instruments. To undertake such study a complete picture of level of trade before and after Nation's Highway construction, membership in CEFTA, different trade agreements and problems, membership in international organizations (such as NATO, Council of Europe etc.,) and political deals have to be studied carefully, so that the results are not probabilistic but based on sound analysis. This can serve to predict the future short and mid-term projections that can help policy-makers, scholars, NGO-s and media to engage in a fruitful debate regarding the future of the two countries.

II. Purpose of the Research

The present study has two overall goals. First, it seeks to provide a clear overview of the situation in Albania and Kosovo with regard to mutual relation since the independence of Kosovo and how these countries see the development of their relations through the eyes of each other in mid and long term period. Second, it develops possible scenarios of these relations by identifying bilateral, regional and wider trends and challenges in this area. In other words, it

investigates the current *status quo*, in order to offer lucid pathways and solid predictions, while calculating the projected chances for occurring for each of the scenarios.

Seen from this perspective, the study not only describes relevant processes and development of relations between Albania and Kosovo but also analyses their interactions critically. For any of the findings highlighted in the text, I seek an interpretation of reasons and causes for the described situation. Thus the study is not merely descriptive, but it seeks to offer an analytical angle and critical eye in evaluating current and potential changes in border shifts and if the process of unification ever takes place between Kosovo and Albania.

III. Methodology

In this project I follow a constructivist design, which tries to understand the dynamic of mutual constitution of national identity, state-formation and border-building. I propose that instead of an assumed automacity and functional view where the state either creates the nation or alternatively is *spilled over* as the result of nationalism and the process ends with perfect congruence of republican and ethnic borders within the modern concept of nation-state, in reality the mental frame and visual mapping is decisive in understanding the mutual constitution of these elements through public discourse. This is also important because often “[e]thnic communities feel a strong association with a particular, so-called ‘national’ territory and use historical, pseudo-historical, or even mythical arguments to press their claims to it” (Coakley 1993: 2), thus having both theoretical and practical relevance.

I follow here a qualitative research design that analyzes the Albania-Kosovo relationship in both spatial and temporal axes. Chapters are chronological, because it is a testing of my hypotheses at different times, in other words it is a qualitative time series analysis. Because of

this choice, I needed to ensure that each chapter accounts for the same variables either contextual, or triggering, and so on. Therefore, I follow the same structure from chapter to chapter. The periods I am looking at, are the following critical junctures.⁵

I have selected a historic and comparative study of present and foreseen relations amongst the Albanian communities in Albania and Kosovo, which allows for in-depth analysis to find underlying causal mechanisms for any potential border shifts. The reason for such case selection is justified by the variations seen in both temporal and spatial axes, allowing for both longitudinal analysis and careful process tracing identifying the causes of such shifts. It is spatial because it analyzes changes in virtual border perception between two Albanian communities: the ones living within Albania proper and ethnic external kin leaving in Kosovo. This kind of operationalization is made, given the fact that the map of *Greater Albania* has most often overlapped with the institutional ones, in regard to this particular community which only later in the 20th century was separated in different states.⁶ The temporal axes analyze different distinct periods from the late 1990s to the present day to find shifts in elite and mass perceptions on both sides of the border, in order to build a systematic answer as to why such shifts happen and what is the projected outcome of borders in the near future.

Furthermore, the present case selection is justified by lack of a systemic analysis in conceptualizing potential border shifts and its current relevance to the present day. Another consideration, are the inferences that can be derived in the relatively new scholarship on territorial and identity borders under the combined straightjacket of systemic factors and

⁵ Critical junctures in this study are those periods where opportunity openings are witnessed for national map reconfiguration and how this map fits/misfits the Albanian state map.

⁶ The most notable case of this is the creation of Republic of Macedonia by Tito in 1945 and the separation of a particular territory inhabited by the Albanian people from Kosovo, in order to join the new state.

idiosyncratic actors, in order to provide added value to the existing theories that explain the shifts of national boundaries.

The way I intend to proceed is to first define and measure the concepts. Then I test the predictions of my arguments and analyze qualitative data. In-depth discourse and content analyses⁷ are two of the main tools I use to carefully study the projected paths that relations between Albania and Kosovo might undertake in the near and mid-term period. Also instrumental to the study is the organization of a focus group with high ranking representatives and distinguished elite figures from diplomacy and foreign affairs, mass media, civil society and universities. Thus using the method of triangulation, which means looking at many sources to construct a more accurate and nuanced picture of how changes have occurred, I strengthen my subsequent argument.⁸

⁷I side here with scholars that recognize the utility of discourse analyses in positivist projects, like the present study -- although I admit the disagreement on this point in the literature-- because I think that it brings added value to in-depth case-study research and reinforces the empirics in the present study. Seen from a slightly different perspective: “the study of discourses is very much the study of conceptions of causal relations among a set, or sets, of agents” (Lynggaard 2011). In both cases, I consider a method that is more typically used in anti-foundational epistemologies/ontologies to be equally compatible with a positivist frame such as the current one.

⁸ See for more on this my recent publication: Ilir Kalemaj. 2014. *Contested Borders: Territorialization of National Identity and Shifts of “Imagined Geographies” in Albania*. Peter Lang Ltd. Oxford.

CHAPTER 1

1.2 Albania and Kosovo relations and dissensions in historical lenses

Albania has lacked a consistent approach toward the ethnic Albanians of (former) Yugoslavia in general and the Albanians of Kosovo in particular. This has had several reasons, which I am briefly listing below.

First of all, it has been the geopolitical and ideological context in the interwar and communist periods. The passing from the monarchical period of Serbian-Croatian-Slovenes Kingdom, which from 1928 became the Yugoslav Kingdom, toward the supra-nationalist communist ideology. This has been a period when Belgrade has often had considerable power over the fate and lives of the ethnic Albanians outside Albania's frontiers but also over Tirana's government and has resulted in periodic fluctuations in the relationship between the two countries.

Secondly, close alliances in certain periods and open enmity in others have been characteristic for Belgrade-Tirana relations. Passing into various love-hate phases during Zog's and Noli's government in interwar period, where the first had a close relations to Yugoslav Premier Pasić. Zog and Pasić had an agreement that included exchange of territories, as well as military and financial support. While Bishop Noli had among his closest collaborators, notables such as H. Prishtina, B. Curri or Azem and Shote Galica who were leaders of anti-Belgrade resistance in Kosovo. During communism we witness two main phases: the first in the period from 1944 to 1948 where Tirana was highly dependent on Belgrade and a considerable cooling between the two in the aftermath. In the first period Tirana declined any cooperation with its 'brethren' outside state borders and participated even in notorious massacres such as the one in Tivar, where hundreds of Kosovar Albanians were killed. After the Constitution of 1974 that Tito introduced as a counter-mechanism to Serbian power within Politburo and state structures

and the degree of relative freedom that the Albanians of Kosovo experiences, Tirana saw an window of opportunity to intervene on their behalf and to start using direct influence there. In the post-communism period, it was then the former opposition head, Sali Berisha who first advocated the unification of all Albanians in a single state but everything was purely rhetorical. After being elected as President he backtracked from earlier statements and by 1994 called Kosovo issue an internal question of former Yugoslavia, same as his socialist successor Fatos Nano who in a meeting with Milosevic in Greece called Kosovo an internal human right issue for Serbia.

Thirdly, Albania has always been weaker politically, militarily and diplomatically isolated, as well as economically deprived, compared to both Yugoslavia and Serbia in all aforementioned periods and this has normally been reflected in Tirana`s attitude toward its Albanian ‘brethren’ outside state frontiers.

Fourthly, the lack of a consolidated political thought and diplomatic agenda has made Tirana generally reactive and not proactive in its relations to Belgrade while the neighboring country has had well-structured elaborates such as *Nacertanija* of Garashanin, or the 1937 “Expulsion of Arnauts” of Cubrilović or the 1986 Memorandum of Cosić et al., which unfortunately are turned later in official discriminatory policy against the Albanians.

Differently from its immediate neighbors, Albania has had difficulties in linking its multi-confessional nature and pervasive societal divides to its developing national identity in the initial stages of nation-building. The other Balkan countries, not only started this process much earlier, but in addition had a high symbiosis between a dominant religion and the newly emerging national identity where the religion often served as bedrock of the latter. As Nicola Pedrazzi has summarized recently: “Albania features no obvious religious conflicts; even so, the fact remains

that, as happens in other areas of the intricate Balkan puzzle, also in Albania – and especially for ethnic Albanians who live outside the boundaries of the Albanian state – religious affiliation is doubly tied to the identity question and has, therefore, also a political dimension” (Pedrazzi 2014).

The historical relationship between Albania and Kosovo and particularly the different trajectories they had both taken as the result of geopolitical pressures and domestic developments, is important in our understanding of the present and prediction of the future.

1.2 Recent findings from surveys and polls that measure bottom up perception

A 2010 poll, conducted by Gallup in cooperation with the European Fund for the Balkans, showed that 62% of respondents in Albania and 81% in Kosovo supported the formation of a *Greater Albania*.⁹ The vast majority of respondents, more than 95% overall in the two countries, said that if such a “Greater Albania” was created, it should include Albania, Kosovo and part of Macedonia. Support is much lower for the union only of Albania and Kosovo. Only 33.7% of respondents in Albania approved of this solution, as did 29.2% in Kosovo and a mere 7.2% in Macedonia. These new data serve both as a testimony of shifts noticed and analyzed in the present study, as well as empirical indications that (should) inform policy and taken into consideration by international organizations, EU structures and other interested third parties. Contradicting data from Gallup polls, a 2010 survey taken by Albanian Institute for International Relations (AIIS) reveal an altogether different picture: from the poll sample in Albania, 37 percent of the interviewed people think that the unification of Albania with Kosovo is neither positive, nor negative, 35 percent think that it is negative and only 9

⁹ See http://www.balkan-monitor.eu/files/Gallup_Balkan_Monitor-Focus_On_Kosovo_Independence.pdf

percent think of it as positive. The majority (35 percent) think that the possibility of unification Albania-Kosovo is slim, 18 percent think of it in average terms and only 9 percent think it is possible. As it can be seen, there is a correlation of numbers between those that think that unification is desired and also possible, while it is slightly less for the other categories of possibility of odds that something like this will ever happen. The poll continues by emphasizing another empirical finding that if the organization for unification of Albania with Kosovo would happen sometime in the near future, then 39 percent of the people that were interviewed were going to vote in favor of reunification, 23 percent against, 21 percent would have abstained and 18 percent would not participate. This data gives us an understanding of the perception of the nation and its mental borders from below. How nation is imagined, what are the chances of border shifts and potential reunification and how much this is desired by the common folk in both sides of the border? As it may be summarized from the above data, approximately same percentage of people (around 35-39 percent) believes that reunification is not possible, but that on the other hand would have voted for reunification is a referendum is possible.

The popular culture have remained largely expansionist in the last two decades in Kosovo, which has constrained political elite into nationalist outbidding with opposition parties usually being more in favor of any unification/expansionary scheme and the ones in government largely more restrained as the result of external constraints, but in Albania the opposite has happened where we witness the elite struggles and political shifts to have much impacted popular grassroots culture. Recently it looks like an ethnic outbidding has started to take effect in Albania, with more than three new nationalist parties taking place in the parliamentary elections of 2013.¹⁰

¹⁰ These new parties were the PDIU, a party whose main electoral base are Albanian Chams that claims propriety that was expropriated from them by Greece after the exchange of populations and deportation following WWII, the

While referring to polls and surveys that measure shifts in mass-perceptions in Albanian populations in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia, it is interesting to note that in the elite level in Kosovo we generally witness two different currents. The dominant one, mostly represented by the political forces that constitute the majority are firmly positioned in maintaining the existing map, which guarantees a fully sovereign Kosovo that has only diplomatic links with Albania. This is based on two primary considerations. The first being the pressure of international community, who adamantly opposes any changes in borders and second, the consideration of politicians in charge of ruling the country who risk losing (existing) power in the advent of any possible unification scheme. However, the main opposition *Vetvendosja*¹¹ has as primary goal the unification of Kosovo with Albania, including Northern Mitrovica and has called for a referendum for its realization. Currently, some new developments are happening in Kosovar politics where a group of deputies requested such unification to take place.¹²

With government changes in Tirana following 2013 elections, there seems to be a reinvigorated attempt to strengthen the cooperation between Albania and Kosovo in several levels. For example, in a tour to Gjakova and Pejë, Prime Rama gave warranties of taking out the double added value taxation for the books, newspapers and magazines. Also there was a discussion for eliminating double taxation for steel products and a common evaluation of customs procedures, thus strengthening both the economic and cultural integration as a symbolic form of *de facto* unification.

Natural List of Koço Danaj which aspires the unification of Albanian –speaking lands in former Yugoslavia and the *Black and Red Alliance*, clearly an irredentist one.

¹¹ Third largest party represented in the parliament.

¹² A group of 12 deputies representing four parliamentary parties petitioned the Parliament with a unification request with Albania, though fell short gathering signatures amongst other colleagues. The goal of the initiators in the first phase was to draw the attention of international community and to achieve the end of negotiation with Belgrade. See for details: <http://www.alsat-m.tv/index.php/lajme/rajoni/116664.html>

Other steps undertaken by the Rama government include removing some of the frontier barriers between the two countries. One of these is the removal of worker barriers for the Albanians of Kosovo and Presevo Valley, who can work in Albania now without any obstacle. This puts the Albanians from Kosovo and South Serbia in a complete different category from every foreign worker in Albania who needs to have worker permit and residency to work in the country. The Minister of Welfare and Youth recently declared that: “[w]e liberalized the job market with Kosovo. The Albanians from Kosovo do not need to apply from now on for work certificates or work permits. Every citizen from Kosovo and Presevo Valley may apply for job in Albania.” According to him, differently from the previous government, “we do not consider as foreigners the Albanians of Presevo Valley, and thus every citizen from there can freely work in Albania.” Whereas, the primer Rama has promised to remove the barriers between the two countries to create common markets, common customary union, common sanitary certification and a new Economic National Council for both Albania and Kosovo.¹³

The idea is to further expand the areas of cooperation between Albania and Kosovo, which for some time now have developed a strategic partnership. How to move beyond this into more tangible results that can further bilateral relations without endangering regional stability and provoking geopolitical concerns from Serbia and other neighboring countries is a challenge in itself. Albania-Kosovo relations should be seen through the perspective of other regional countries and the intrinsic relations that Albania has built or plans to build in the near future.

Seen from this light, ArturZheji, Mapo`s daily director and columnist argues that Albania has very close links with some of the neighboring countries. For example he mentions Macedonia where as it puts “Albania is a stakeholder in 35%” of the territory referring of course to the

¹³<http://www.gazetatema.net/web/2014/05/07/hiqen-lejet-e-punes-per-qytetaret-e-kosoves-dhe-lugines-se-presheves/>

percentage that Albanians claim to have on it. He goes on by adding that same can be even more true for Kosovo that is “conceptual and real part of same [Albanian] land, with Montenegro where [Albania] has its own land and people, with Greece, with which is often misunderstood based on a century ongoing conflict, with Serbia that it fought an epic war just recently....” (Zheji 2014). He continues by stressing that despite all these ‘natural’ comparative advantages, Albania has never used conflict to achieve aims, although as Zheji puts it this is more because the Albanian elites have preferred corruption and comfort rather than geopolitical adventures. He concludes by writing that we cannot take the past for granted “because the Albanian capacity for interaction can quickly turn a destabilizing one. Thus it must be integrated” (Zheji 2014).

Another analyst from Albania, AfrimKrasniqi points at how demagogic is the language of political elite in Kosovo and Albania where they simultaneously speak of spiritual and cultural unification, economic common perspective and complimentary processes in other matters while in practice the reality is completely different. For example in the field of mass media, Krasniqi writes: “each of the parties operates with the ways and means of the other, transmitting the news from the other country without proper verification and the derogatory language of Pristina is transmitted in Tirana and vice versa” (Krasniqi 2014). Also as the author notes, the newspapers, magazines, books etc., of Albania do not reach Kosovo and same for those of Kosovo where the Albania`s market seems closed. Even political influence is very limited not only in the direction of Pristina-Tirana but also of Tirana-Pristina, given the putative role of Albania as the “mother” country.

Thus, the reification of Tirana as the epicenter of the Albanian nation and its political, cultural and socio-economic significance, seem to be mostly in name but not as matter of fact. Although various politicians can be found at any time in both countries who try to

instrumentalize the “National Questions” for daily political gains, what is important is assessing how much of the public ear these tirades capture. The problems are the same in the two countries despite much fuss, but in some occasions there are major public splits, like in the case of Kadare-Qosja debate where major public figures coalesced around the two thinkers, although not necessarily in respective state lines. In other words, it is not that Kosovars went automatically to rally behind Qosja and the Albanians of Albania behind their most prominent writer, Mr. Kadare. Generally speaking the support for Kadare was greater on both sides of the border and not just because of his public and intellectual statute but also because his pro-West thesis found more resonance among the public opinion.

Chapter 2

International Community and Kosovo Development

3.1 EU’s Political, Judicial, Technical and Financial Support to Kosovo

European Union has been particularly influential in setting up the pace regarding Kosovo’s normalization process. It has done so through its common mechanisms of “sticks and carrots”, or to put it otherwise through a package of incentives and conditionality that has sought to integrate Kosovo while making sure that reforms are completed. EU has several mechanisms in hand to do so. First of all, through the leadership of Baroness Ashton, the former foreign policy leading figure in EU has tried to break ground in relations between Belgrade and Pristina by creating the opportunity for Dacić (former Serbian premier) and Thaçi to sit, discuss and agree on a variety of issues that range from archives to security, from extra-territorial jurisdiction of Serbian enclaves

and religious cults in Kosovo to protection of rights of minorities. The broken negotiations and agreements have been stepping stones for a lasting regional peace and the integration process of the whole region, which could also open the road for Kosovo to be first recognized by the remaining European countries that have not done yet so and later aspire to integrate in the EU itself.

Regarding this last point, although up to the present moment, five European states (Greece, Slovakia, Romania, Spain and Cyprus) have not yet recognized Kosovo officially, the dual process initiated in tandem with Serbia under the tutelage of the European Union, itself is a good omen to the process. Moreover, a EU based mission in Kosovo, EULEX, has played a crucial role for its security and justice system, despite present-day corruption allegations, which have led the new EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini to announce the enlisting of “an independent expert for a probe into allegations of corruption in the European Union rule of law mission.”¹⁴

3.2 UN role in Kosovo in the aftermath of independence

United Nation`s role in Kosovo after independence period has also been instrumental regarding the establishment of a climate of security especially in north of the country (Northern Mitrovica), where Kosovo`s government`s authority has been lacking, though chiefly not for its fault. UNMIK has been the UN`s mission in Kosovo from 1999 after it was established with resolution 1244 of the Security Council. As it is mentioned explicitly in its website: “the objective of the Mission has been the promotion of security, stability and respect for human rights in Kosovo through engagement with all communities in Kosovo, with the leadership in

¹⁴<http://inserbria.info/today/2014/11/mogherini-independent-probe-for-eulex/>

Pristina and Belgrade, and with regional and international actors, including the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Meanwhile, KFOR has remained on the ground to provide necessary security presence in Kosovo.”¹⁵

UNMIK`s role has had a lot of overlapping with other international missions in Kosovo chiefly EULEX and KFOR, but also OSCE, different embassies, particularly the role and weight of US Embassy etc. Lately the role and impact have shrank to a considerable degree from the peak point when Ban Ki Moon, the UN General Secretary was proposing his (in)famous six-point plan.¹⁶ The plan was contradicted almost in unison from Kosovar political elite, an opposition that found ambiguous reception in Tirana because the former Foreign Minister Besnik Mustafai was in fact in favor of a “limited independence” clause for Kosovo. This fitted with Ban Ki Moon plan that was especially sensitive in its recommendations regarding boundaries and Serbian patrimony.¹⁷

2.3 USA role and impact from independence to present day

USA has been a leading actor from the start in the Kosovo conflict, when it took the leading role to mobilize NATO and start bombing Serbian military facilities in a seventy two day campaign after Milosević failed to stop the ethnic cleansing process that resulted in thousands of Kosovar Albanians losing their lives and others to simply perish or be forcibly deported from their homes and property. Naturally USA`s government was not the only actor with great impact in the process. Great Britain played an equally pivotal role in the process under the charismatic

¹⁵<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmik/mandate.shtml>

¹⁶<http://www.kosovocompromise.com/cms/item/topic/en.html?view=story&id=1571>

¹⁷ *Ibid*

leadership of Tony Blair, whose formulation of the new and revolutionizing concept of “humanitarian intervention”, added great value to the operation that made possible the liberation of Kosovo.

The United States government and its representatives in Pristina have also been a crucial factor that has impacted the state-building process in Kosovo and with great acumen in domestic political affairs.¹⁸ They have also had same influence in Albania, FYROM and the other Western Balkan countries, although to a lesser degree. That influence is often of a greater degree than that of the EU missions, although in the case of Kosovo probably they are of similar weight but in different planes.

Chapter 3

3.1 Albania's position toward the EU Integration and how it relates to Albania-Kosovo future

Albania is way ahead of the newcomer state of Kosovo in its path toward European integration. After a considerable degree of slowness following the violent events in 1997, after which Albania had to join the former Yugoslav republics in association-stabilization negotiations with the European Union, Albania could finally sign its Association-Stabilization Agreement

¹⁸ The examples are various but we can briefly mention here the role played by the American ambassador in breaking the deal to elect Ahtifete Jahjaga as the President, following the verdict of the Supreme Court that declared the invalidity of the process that had elected Behgjet Pacolli. Another testimony of strong American presence is Bondsteel base, the largest in Balkans and different pronouncements on domestic political affairs in Kosovo of various American ambassadors. The latest was by the current ambassador, Tracey Ann Jacobson told the Kosovar political elite not to mess things up, using an explicit Albanian expression “mos e dhinipunen” which took the front pages of Albanian daily newspapers the next day in both Albania and Kosovo. See for more detail: <http://botasot.info/lajme/339598/ambasadorja-e-shba-ne-kosove-u-drejtohet-shqip-politikaneve-mos-e-dhini-punen-video/>

(ASA) in 2002 and then move forward with its reforms. Unfortunately Albania had to wait for a considerable longer period than its neighbors such as Croatia and FYROM, which signed their candidacy status as early as 2004 and Croatia even succeeded into getting full accession in EU in June 2013.

Furthermore, Albania was bypassed even from the new state of Montenegro that became independent only in 2006 and signed its candidacy status in 2010. It later opened the negotiation for full membership in 29 June 2012. Albania was sidelined even from Serbia that signed its candidacy status in October 22 of 2011, despite having signed its ASA only in 2007, five years after Albania. It then opened its negotiations for full membership in European Union in January of 2014.

Albania's considerable advance vis-à-vis Kosovo in its race to join the EU, makes Albania abide to rules and regulations, which include certain standards that cannot be overlooked in the name of the good friendship with Kosovo. One of these has to do with the *acquiscommunitaire* and the different laws and directives of EU that Albania has to abide. The latest such example was flour import from Kosovo which did not fully subscribe to EU criteria and in addition, its nutritional levels were below the EU standard requirements.¹⁹ This followed yet other trade wars between the two countries,²⁰ which despite the real motivations or reasons have been justified on the basis of EU required norms, especially by Albania, which is a step ahead than Kosovo in its integration process.

¹⁹ <http://www.gazetaexpress.com/lajme/panariti-ska-barriera-per-miellin-kosovar-qe-ploteson-standardet-48693/>

²⁰ Such trade wars include but are not limited to potato and honey, cement and milk. See for a detailed view: <http://www.lajmeonline.net/en/commercial-returns-kosovo-war-shqiperi/>

3.2 Kosovo`s position toward the EU Integrationand how it relates to Albania-Kosovo future

Kosovo has several difficulties in its rocky road to become a full-fledged European Union member. One of these is the fact that is a newly independent country. It declared its independence only in February of 2008. To make things even more complicated it is recognized only by a bit more than half of world countries,²¹ so its recognition it is not yet universally accepted and what matters most for our discussion here, it is still not recognized as a sovereign state by five of the EU member states. The five are Spain, Greece, Slovakia, Romania and Cyprus and their reasons are mix and so is their level of cooperation with Kosovo. Some of these countries, like Greece have opened diplomatic offices in Pristina, yet others like Cyprus are adamant in their opposition to recognize Kosovo, even after Serbia will do so, according to declaration from top foreign policy offices in the country.

This puts Kosovo in a precarious situation, but recognition waves have made Kosovo clearly a standout and distinct case, thus adding legitimacy for its secession and proclamation of independence. Thus Kosovo is a *sui generis* case, not directly related to other national liberation movements across the world and whose legitimacy is based on precedents set by the other former Yugoslav republics whose secession was legitimized by Badinter Commission. The International Court of Justice duly recognized such legitimacy, thus paving the way for Kosovo to be considered as a legal member of world community.²²

Kosovo has already joined the process of integration in the EU, thus opening negotiations for visa liberalization process after starting breaking ground with Serbia in negotiations led by

²¹ By comparison Palestine is recognized by circa 135 countries and still is far from being legitimately accepted in international organizations or other venues and its independence fiercely opposed not only by Israel, but also USA and several major European countries.

²² See for a detailed view on this Kalemaj 2013.

EU and its chief foreign policy officer, former Higher Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Policy, Baroness Ashton. The same talks helped Serbia first to receive the candidate status in March 2012 and two years later, in January of 2014 to successfully open the negotiation chapters for full accession into EU. Kosovo trails Albania in its integration speed and such asymmetry may lead to potential friction in the present and future regarding free circulations of goods, services, labor and capital as well as restrictions vis-à-vis such goods and freedom of movement from third countries.

3.3 Findings from the focus group

For the purpose of drawing a more nuanced picture and various viewpoints regarding the current state of affairs between Albania and Kosovo and short and medium term projections, we organized a focus group with the participation of journalists, academicians, diplomats, economists and culture specialists. They brought their informed views about the current and prospective economic, cultural, social and political relations between the two states.

Florjan Salaj for example, discussing from an economist's point of view expressed the view that commercial activity has not been consistent between Albania and Kosovo. But he added, "from 2008 until presently the government's approach has been consistent." Also he believed that a unified cultural market is emerging, marriages between citizens of both countries are booming etc. Same opinion about the unification of a cultural market, where the example of books, magazines, newspapers and TVs were read and watched simultaneously in both sides of the border was shared by literary critic Behar Gjoka and economist Gjergj Erebara.

The professor of European Studies Mirela Bogdani on the other hand expressed her strong conviction that any potential unification between the two countries would be impossible. And

this was not only because of international actors opposing it, but also crucially important the differences between the two units which have had different historical trajectories. Also for Bogdani, the deeper religious component among the Kosovar Albanians slightly contrasted with their secular brethren in Albania. Dorian Koçi, pointed at the forbidding clause in Ahtissari's Plan and later also reflected in the Kosovo's Constitution, which expressly forbids a potential unification between Kosovo and Albania.

The former ambassador of Albania in Germany and a seasoned diplomat Tomorr Alizoti put his emphasizes in the lack of a coherent strategy from Albania's foreign policy and this has led the UN representative to talk of "limited independence" of Kosovo in his declarations of 2004. Later Albania has tried to keep a moderate role that was conform international factors' stance. Same view of Albania's lack of long term strategy vis-à-vis Kosovo but also simultaneous lack of strategy from Kosovo too, was shared by the other diplomat in the meeting Elvina Isufaj, who is currently Executive Director of Albanian Council of Foreign Relations. She continues by stressing that "the lack of strategy was one the factors that had a negative impact when in 2005 Albania asked for the same limited independence for Kosovo, which was something absurd coming from Albania."

While Dr. Fabian Zhilla in his discussion noted the lack of common policies in education and other important fields, which makes any potential deepening of cooperation between the two countries hard to come by. Paradoxically on the other hand, he also observes a rising nationalist fervor in both sides of the border. Geron Kamberi, a policy officer at Quo Dev Albania carefully notes a successful; strategy in infrastructure and not only in terms of roads, like the Nation's Highway project but also the energetic infrastructure etc. Journalist Lavdrim Lita sees the bottom-up perception as very important while figuring not enough in textbooks. He also notes

the weakness of the Albanian state and the fact that more than Albanians themselves, the foreigners are the ones that have given more thought to the Albanian unification process. Despite that, Kosovo and Albania have sent joint military troops in Afghanistan etc., is a signal that a growing cooperation between the two states also in military, security and foreign affairs is coming under the way, notwithstanding the fact the in the new Homeland Security Strategy in Albania, Kosovo figures only in a single line.

Economist Zef Preçi contrasts this view with the fact that also in Kosovo`s strategy of 2020, Albania figures peripherally. But he mostly blames Albania`s political class for lack of vision in regard to Kosovo, which in turn makes “Yugosphere” the only feasible geopolitical agreement. This last one of course excludes Albania. He also pointed out at the inferiority problem that elites in Tirana and Pristina have and the complexity they show vis-à-vis foreigners and that is manifested among other things in Tirana using Kosovo rather than Kosova as official terminology. He also pointed out at the secrecy that Tirana maintains in regard to disclosure of its diplomatic agenda regarding Kosovo in particular and the region in general and he mentions the visit of premier Rama in Belgrade, whose agenda for him is kept in mystery.

On the other hand, journalist and TV moderator Artur Nura noted that “internal conflict can easily transform into foreign policy.” For him though a *de facto* unification of Albania and Kosovo has already occurred, citing as an example the company Digitalb, which makes possible for Tirana`s TV channels to be watched in Kosovo. Although Mr. Nura points at this, he did not account for the lack of representation of Pristina`s TV and radio stations in Albania. Also Albania lacks any other mediums coming from Kosovo, such as newspapers, magazines and to a lesser degree also books.

Journalist Gjergj Zefi reminded the other participants of the fact that the war in Kosovo was won by Albanians only through NATO intervention. But on the other hand he said: “[i]n EU we do not only join Kosovo, but also Serbia.” He also made sure to underline that “money does not have color” and that economy brings people and culture together even in a volatile and politically sensitive region, such as Western Balkans. Mirela Bogdani added here that the only integration process is not that between Albania and Kosovo but only those directed toward integration in the EU where Kosovo and Albania can join despite their cultural divisions. Also she noted “Kosovo is still under international tutelage and religion is much more divisive in Kosovo than in Albania, as well as more influent”, but these divisions can be well overcome after integration in the European Union of both countries.

Chapter IV

ANALYSIS OF SHORT, MEDIUM AND LONG TERM RELATION BETWEEN ALBANIA AND KOSOVO

Potential Scenarios

- **Scenario A**

In this scenario, Kosovo and Albania borders would become gradually irrelevant as part of the European Union if both are integrated at that stage. The potential period when this may happen, we assume to be no earlier than 2030. For Albania the prospect of membership, if due reforms are undertaken and laws properly implemented, thus fully constituting the rule of law, can be as early as 2022-2023, in Kosovo`s case even in best case scenario, the full accession cannot realistically happen before 2030.

In Albania, the main challenges and ‘homework’ are providing anti-corruption mechanisms, fighting the organized crime and money laundering, a fully functional public administration based on meritocracy and purged of party militants, property rights and reforming the justice system which is broadly perceived to be dysfunctional, politically biased and corrupted. In Kosovo, the challenges are even greater. Not only does Kosovo suffer by most of the aforementioned symptoms, but in addition it is not fully recognized even by EU member countries, where five countries (Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Slovakia and Romania) have so far refused to offer recognition. Also, Kosovo does not fully possess the elements of internal sovereignty, where Northern Mitrovica is outside effective control of Pristina government and structures such as UNMIK, KFOR and EULEX continue to limit the full prerogatives of a Kosovo state. Furthermore, Kosovo faces a high degree of danger from Islamic fundamentalism. According to philosophy professor Blerim Latifi and sociologist Ismail Hasani, it is the political and development crises which in tandem with poor quality in educational system create a habitat for political Islam to grow and endanger the perspective of Kosovo’s youth.²³

From another perspective, Thaçi’s government and mainstream political spectrum is resisting well to nationalist pressures as the Economist Intelligence Unit of 2014 reports.²⁴ Parallel with this, the relations between Albania and Kosovo are getting stronger, although the authorities in both countries have distanced themselves from nationalists who call for “Greater Albania”. Also the report notes that the Socialist government in Tirana it is seen to be more reluctant in nationalist calls than their predecessors.²⁵

²³<http://www.gazetatema.net/web/2014/08/13/latifi-mungesa-e-cilesise-ne-arsim-nje-nga-arsyet-e-radikalizmit-islamik/>

²⁴<http://country.eiu.com/albania>

²⁵ *Ibid*

However in long term perspective, the aforementioned scenario is the most probable one, since EU's commitment to its Western Balkan "backyard", is to leave no black holes behind. This EU commitment is despite short term policy approach that is embraced also by successful countries from the region, like Croatia which joined EU last year that have favored the "regatta principle". This principle requires each country to progress toward integration at its own pace, thus replacing the "caravan principle" which professes the in bloc concept of accession, thus forcing the more successful states to be on same par with laggards (Gogova&Radoslavova 2001).

- **Scenario B**

In this other scenario, Albania and Kosovo are part of one of the following regional forums: Balkan Union, Balkan Benelux, CEFTA etc., but only one of them, most probably Albania, is part of the EU in the next ten years or so. This is what actually is happening and the candidacy status of Albania that is waiting to open the negotiation chapters for full accession is promising. This seems to be the most realistic term scenario given the actual trends and potential developments. Such trajectories would make the relation between the two countries asymmetric in the short-term and potentially medium period, given rise to potential frictions or complaints from various interest and pressure groups from both sides.

The present lack of political will as well as vision and leadership is also reflected in an economic asymmetry. As Arben Malaj, the former Minister of Finance noted in a recent meeting organized by AIIS in Tirana about Commercial Relations between Albania and Kosovo, "we lack common institutions. Also we are in need of improvement of monitoring system to improve efficacy", which according to Malaj should not be done by governments, but by the experts. Gjergj Buxhuku of KONFINDUSTRIA expressed the view that "for as long as the border will

exist, the disagreements will continue”, thus pushing for a border change in a unilateral manner which did not find the consensus of the other participants. Rightly, the economist Selami Xhepa noted that infrastructure makes borders invisible and enables growth of levels of trade. He took the example of the Kosovo highway which increased the trade volume to 23% up from 4% before the highway construction and he insisted that internet should be used more for business on both sides of border and less for recreational purposes. Because Balkan Peninsula has little resemblance to other European peninsulas- as Geron Kamberi rightly noted in the same meeting, and we tend to produce more or less same products and have fragmented markets which makes both Albania and Kosovo less competitive in international markets. It seems that the only remedy is a potential unification which for most observers though it should only come *de facto* after integration of both units in the European Union.

The level of trade is also reflected in the number of businesses of both states in the territory of the other. There are only 380 Kosovar businesses in Albania, some of which are with mixed capital and a bit over 500 of Albanian companies in Kosovo, which is a testimony of the market operating under its full potential. Although situation looks grim, it looks that new initiatives are undertaken by both governments Rama and Thaçi to increase trade volume and deepen the already friendly partnership. Such initiatives range from energy matters to facilitations of workers from respective countries to freely work and pay social security dues in either country which will later go through their respective pension schemes, although these new policy initiatives need still to be implemented in order to go from words to deeds. Other areas of strong cooperation are those of police troops where an agreement has been reached that Kosovar patrols can operate within Albania's territory and vice-versa during the summer when the holidays reach their peak.

Other areas include unification of textbooks, a primary for both countries, unification of curricula etc.

Even in those regional organizations where Kosovo is extended invitation, it is done so with an accompanying asterisk, although not a footnote as it was previously suggested. This is a step forward but Kosovo is still not allowed to use state symbols like state flag and Serbian officials are required to ask for UNMIK presence (Jovanović and Karadaku 2012). It is not sure what the situation will be from now onwards since Kosovo has recently made the formal request for UNMIK to withdraw its mission.

- **Scenario C**

Albania and Kosovo realize *de facto* unification before accession in EU. This is a rather unlikely scenario, although it is cheerfully claimed by nationalists in both sides of the border. Amongst the supporters of such view one can find mainstream political parties like Vetvendosja in Kosovo (left wing nationalist party) to PDIU in Albania (center right nationalist party in Albania) to the parties on the fringe of the political spectrum like Natural List and Aleanca Kuqezi in Albania and Partia e Drejtësisë in Kosovo (which is part of the pre-election and still ongoing governing coalition) etc. Regarding Vetvendosja, as an analyst from Albania has put it recently in an interview for the daily Zëri in Kosovo: “[t]o be fair, they [Vetvendosja] have proposed one thing, the old idea of national unification as a metaphor of Albanian panacea. The medicine that cures everything is national unity in one flag, according to Albin” (Lita 2014). Although Lita continues by arguing that Albin Kurti so far has not found an ally for his political project in Kosovo or Albania, in fact the examples above, like PDIU, a parliamentary party and

AK in Albania, or some small parties in the fringes of political life in Kosovo testify for the opposite.

Not only political parties are supporters of this view. Evidence presented above from recent polls and surveys also show a surprisingly high support for unification between the two countries, although slightly less so when asked to assess how realistic they thought it would be. Another important category is the nationalizing intellectuals, who have consistently asked for a rapid and successful unification “between the two parts of the same trunk”. Such prominent ones include in their ranks, the likes of Rexhep Qosja or Adem Demaçi amongst Kosovo Albanians and several intellectuals and prominent writers among the Albania`s counterpart.

- **Scenario D**

Albania and Kosovo operate as two functional countries without any projected unification of any kind, where Albania joins EU, with Kosovo still to conclude state-building process. This is the prospect for the next 10-15 years in my view. I expect Albania to fulfill the integration process and finally join European Union by 2022-2023, while for Kosovo the perspective can go as far as in the range of 2035-2040, unless there is a change of plans and the region is integrated in block.

This scenario seems to be happening as we write, since Albania has already received the candidacy status and is waiting to open the negotiation chapters for full accession anytime now. The exact period is not yet settled but Albania has already received a list of ‘homework’ to be completed, which include the reforms to combat organized crime and corruption, depoliticization of public administration, the reform in the legal system, finding a property rights

long-term solution and political consensus that would finally stabilize the country and make it more prone to democratization.

However, as it was made clear recently in the Berlin Summit where the leaders of the Western Balkans took place, there will not be further accession in the region for the next five years. In other words, no candidate country (Serbia, Albania, Montenegro and Macedonia) or Kosovo and Bosnia- Herzegovina can expect to join European Union at least until 2019. This is realistic period but countries like Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina, due to recognition issues or state-building and other functional problems have to realistically wait for another decade after the other four will most probably have joined.

Conclusion

The question of borders dissolution after both Kosovo and Albania will finally join the European Union, assumes an explicit automaticity, which does not take into consideration the various hindrances to this process. Albin Kurti, the charismatic leader of Vetvendosje, has often repeated that membership in the European Union does not dissolve borders but hardens them. In other words, this implies that the Albanians of Kosovo and Albania should seek unification before and not after joining EU.

In terms of the objective factors which can present a hindrance of a facilitating factor toward potential unification of friction between the two countries before or after entrance in EU, which most probably will be based on individual merits and structural reforms, we can list some important factors. One is the economic size, which is more than twice in Albania (with 9.6 billion Euros) vis-à-vis Kosovo with merely 4.5 billion Euros. Although this roughly correspond to the number of population which is almost double in Albania or the territorial scope which is

almost three times as big in Albania than in Kosovo, still asymmetries can turn easily into fears which prevent further integration between themselves. But on the other hand, they can equally turn into opportunities if leaders of both countries recognize that even the merger of the two states still is a small step in creating the proper consumer demand and attracting enough foreign direct investment because the size of the market remains small in comparative terms. Still in that case it would be more attractive than current one and it will probably be an incentive to move things forward, at least by seeking to integrate financial markets and find solutions that can culminate in a customs union or even reach the stage of full economic integration.

We opened this study with the events that happened in Belgrade stadium where anti-Albanian chants were loudly heard from Serbian fans and a drone that carried the flag of Greater Albania flew in a provocative manner in the stadium. The visit of premier Rama in Belgrade, historic for its nature was postponed by three weeks as a result and that achieved only after the intervention of Chancellor Merkel and the other international partners. But how motivated are the fears of a “Greater Albania,” which basically presupposes the unification of Kosovo with Albania? Florian Bieber in a recent article for *Sudeosteuropa* writes *inter alia*: “[t]he idea of a “Greater Serbia” and “Natural Albania” (as its proponents often call it) exist. Yet, these are irrelevant ideas. The Red and Black Alliance in Albania got just a little more than 10,000 votes in parliamentary elections in 2013, the only party supporting this agenda openly” (Bieber 2014). This has been true for the entire post-communist period and simply there have not been any legacies from the past for a so-called Greater Albania, so these fears are simply not motivated and not backed up empirically.

Quite on the contrary, I believe that any projection for a *de jure* unification prior to full accession of the two countries (Albania and Kosovo) in the European Union, which might take

decades, is simply not realistic and impossible to materialize and not only because of constitutional obstacles and opposition of international actors, but also from resistance by the mainstream political leaders in both countries which may see any potential unification as a threat to their personal power. Whereas, *de facto* unification on the other hand, which may culminate in either a free market zone, a custom union or a full integrated economic zone, before or after full accession in EU, can be realized to some degree and with some success, depending on the political willingness and geopolitical circumstances. Yet it can be only between Albania and Kosovo or otherwise it can be in a form of a regional organization, such as the idea of Balkan Benelux, which includes also FYROM and Montenegro in a projected scenario.

All in all, in the current study, we analyzed the projected scenarios of cooperation between Albania and Kosovo, how they have evolved from Kosovo's proclamation of independence, how they are now and what are the chances for each potential scenario in the short and medium terms. Of course, I also briefly considered the historical, cultural, and political history of the past in the relations between Albania and Kosovo, in order to draw substantial and well-based inferences for the immediate future. It is my contention that European integration path is slightly different for the two countries, with Albania having more chances to join prior to Kosovo the EU and this will further conditionalize the former's attitude toward the latter in economic, social, cultural, and political areas of cooperation. The ultimate desire of a potential unification between two halves following the German model after the Iron Curtain, which has been the ultimate goal of nationalist actors and factors in both sides of borders is hard to be imagined and concretized outside the framework of European accession of both countries, where borders would become irrelevant and a full economic integration fully achieved.

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